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The Sketch Book

PART TWO—ESSAYS



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WASHINGTON IRVING

STANDARD LITERATURE SERIES

THE SKETCH-BOOK

PART TWO: ESSAYS

BY

WASHINGTON IRVING

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

EDWARD EVERETT HALE, JR., PH.D.

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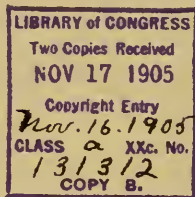
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PREFATORY NOTE

THE object of this volume is to give characteristic examples of the essays of the *Sketch-Book*. The Introduction, therefore, deals particularly with the essay as a literary form and with Irving's essays especially. The main facts of Irving's life are so familiar that no attempt has been made to give a complete biographical sketch. It has seemed enough to present the main lines of his career in a more cursory manner.

EDWARD E. HALE, JR.

UNION COLLEGE.

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INTRODUCTION

THE LIFE OF IRVING

IRVING observes of the lives of literary men that they afford few striking themes for the sculptor (p. 12); we may say much the same thing of his own life from the standpoint of the biographer. It was in the main successful, happy and honorable, both to himself, to his friends and to the country. In his earlier days he made some study of the law (1797), his friends offered him opportunities in the public service (1813), necessity led him to a commercial life (1815). But it was not as a lawyer or a diplomatist or a man of business that he was to distinguish himself. He first turned to literature as an amusement, but it became an absorbing occupation. He and his friends planned and carried out *Salmagundi* (1807); he wrote *Knickerbocker's New York* (1809) as humorous satires for the society of which he was an accepted part. But later, when he produced the *Sketch-Book* (1820), and the long series of tales, essays, histories and narratives that followed it, he wrote as a professional man of letters, and in no long time as the most distinguished man of letters of his country. Long before his death Irving was the representative American author. The appearance of each one of his works was a literary occasion. Everybody was proud of him and felt that in him America presented herself worthily to the literary world.

Yet this distinguished and representative American lived long abroad. For seventeen of the most important years of his life (1816-1832), the years in which he was making his literary reputation, Irving lived in England and Spain. This we can readily understand. Irving was a lover of old-time romance: the cordial old English customs and the color of old Spanish adventure appealed to him strongly. So when he once began to give the world his sketches of English life and manners, and his tales and histories of romantic Spain, he found enough to busy him for many years. Yet even when abroad he did not forget America. He was in England when he wrote the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." Of

him, indeed, we may truthfully say what he said of Shakespeare: "The singular gift of the poet to be able thus to spread the magic of his mind over the very face of nature, to give to things and places a charm and character not their own, and to turn this 'working day world' into a perfect fairyland" (p. 102). Tarrytown and the Catskills are now places of romance by the power of Irving's pen, though in themselves no more romantic than Schenectady or the Adirondacks.

On his return he was an author of established reputation. Now he turned his mind more directly to American subjects. Here belong his *Tour of the Prairies* (1835), his history of the fur traders of Astoria (1836), his *Life of Captain Bonneville* (1837). Here belong the studies that ended in his great life of Washington (1855-1859). His home at Irvington, as the town was named in his honor, was a noteworthy place in America, and he was the most noteworthy man in his own walk of life. Here he lived happily till his death (1859), with brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces (for he himself never married), a life of literary accomplishment, broken only by some years abroad (1842-1846), in which he returned to Spain not merely as a famous man of letters, but as the accredited representative of his country in public affairs.

IRVING AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Washington Irving was the first American to attain an international reputation in literature. There had been American authors before his day who had been well known in Europe as well as America. One of these was Jonathan Edwards, the famous theologian; one Benjamin Franklin, the famous diplomat and scientist. But these great men, and others, had been best known for other things than literature. Jonathan Edwards was known for his theology and his metaphysics; Franklin chiefly for his scientific discoveries and his political services. Of the latter it was said that he had snatched the lightning from the skies and the sceptre from tyrants, a saying which refers to his discoveries in electricity and his services in the Revolution. Franklin was undoubtedly known from his literature also. In France he was called "Le Bonhomme Richard," from *Poor Richard's Almanac*. But in spite of such things, American literature was not thought of abroad until Irving. We

may ask how it should have been. Before 1800 there were in America hardly any cities of any size, hardly any publishing houses, not many newspapers even. There had been literary activity, it is true, but it had not been such as to interest the world. With Irving this was changed. Whatever notice was given to American literature in general, he was certainly a noteworthy figure almost at once. Sir Walter Scott had seen great powers of humor and sensibility in *Knickerbocker's New York*. Murray took the *Sketch-Book* when its first publisher failed and welcomed the author to his drawing-room, "a great resort of literary characters." *Frazier's Magazine* included a picture of him in its Gallery of Literary Characters. He received a gold medal from the Royal Society, the degree of D.C.L. from Oxford. All in all, he was recognized as a man of letters of reputation. In his success America felt itself becoming a part of the great Republic of Letters.

Irving did not represent America in just the manner that might have been expected. America was in his day a new country, and Europe, at that time and later, rather expected from it new and original literary forms and ideas. They expected that American authors would be distinctively American in some way. For this reason Walt Whitman afterward was favorably received in England: there was something fresh and powerful in the rugged and unfettered form of his poetry. For this reason, too, among others, was Bret Harte delightful to Europe: he presented novel and romantic scenes of life which accorded with the European idea of America. But Irving made his success in well-established lines. His first work was in *Salmagundi*, a periodical written by him and a few literary friends, very closely after the model of Addison's *Spectator* of a hundred years before. That work had had a very great influence upon literature, and had had great numbers of followers. Of these *Salmagundi* was one of the last. In the *Spectator*, it will be remembered, we have a club which is supposed to get together a series of little essays upon the town, the country and life in general. So in *Salmagundi*. Instead of the *Spectator*, Sir Roger de Coverley, and Will Honeycomb, we have Lancelot Langstaffe, Anthony Evergreen, and William Wizard. Instead of the club meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays, we have the meetings of the junto about the Elbow Chair with the London Particular at hand. Instead of the *Spectator's* visit to Sir Roger we have the humors of Cockloft Hall. In *Salmagundi* Irving and his friends, young men of brilliancy and wit, showed their cleverness, as was most natural, in well-accepted forms. In

like manner Irving's second work, his first decided success, was in well-established lines. When Sir Walter Scott wrote to the author of *Knickerbocker's New York*, he said: "I have never read anything so closely resembling the style of Dean Swift. . . . I think, too, there are passages which indicate that the author possesses powers of a different kind, and has some touches which remind me much of Sterne." Swift was the greatest satirist of the century then just past, and Sterne the greatest sentimentalist. In satire and sentiment, then, Irving in his *New York* reminded people of forerunners in English literature.

In the *Sketch-Book*, too, Irving expressed himself in forms long familiar. The tales, of which there are a number, are, as a rule, not very different from the many tales which had appeared and were appearing in the English press. The essays were not in kind very different from the essays which at that day filled the English periodicals. We must not think this in any way remarkable; it was not very logical to suppose that America, because she offered the world an experiment in politics, was going to experiment in everything else. In literature especially a new country rarely offers experiments. Old countries often experiment in literature, because they are tired of the old forms, but new countries incline at first to stick to literary traditions. America has furnished the world a number of innovators, but, as a rule, her great men of letters have found the existing literary forms sufficient for their purposes. Irving and Emerson, Longfellow and Poe, Hawthorne and Cooper, found that the ordinary forms of the essay, the novel, the poem, enabled them to say what they wished to say. If they were often inspired by American life, they did not find it necessary to invent specifically American forms. Irving took the tale and the essay much as he found them in literature and made himself an international reputation, largely because he showed himself an easy master of the old forms and an equal of those already deemed excellent. We may, then, well use Irving's work as a means of studying the English essay.

THE ESSAY AS A LITERARY FORM

There are various kinds of essays to be found in English literature. We will note some of the most representative.

First, there are the essays of Bacon. These are short speculations on some general topic like Friendship, Studies, Death. Each essay is

made up of short, concise, pithy sentences which might well stand alone. It gathers together the reflections of a scholarly mind on the subject in hand, passing from point to point with some connection of thought, but never aiming at a complete treatment. Such essays were not uncommon throughout the seventeenth century, although they did not always go by the name of Essays. One variety consisted of sketches of character: these were sometimes more complete in treatment than Bacon's essays, which were commonly on moral topics; but the method was much the same. Another form connected together a number of shorter reflections on some general topic, as in Fuller's *Holy and Profane State*. But all were of much the same sort of thinking as Bacon's. The general tone of concise moralizing pervades the prose literature of the century.

Next in order chronologically come the essays of Cowley. These essays differ from those of Bacon in that they have a personal touch. Thus Bacon writes of gardens, for example, and, indeed, gives you his opinions as to what is best in ordering and laying them out. But Cowley begins: "I never had any other desire so strong, and so like to covetousness, as that one which I have had always, that I might be master at last of a small house and large garden, with very moderate conveniences joined to them, and then dedicate the remainder of my life only to the culture of them, and study of nature." And this personal touch—the result perhaps of Cowley's being a poet as well as an essayist—gives a new quality to the essay. It is no longer concise and epigrammatic, at least of necessity, but is more apt to wander on as most of us do in our easy thoughts. It is no longer very short, for most men, when they write as they please, rather like to take their time. It is still an essay, however, for that word means the same thing as "assay"—namely, a trial or experiment. In Cowley's essays, as in Bacon's, the writer makes no effort to give a complete treatment of the subject, but makes a trial of what he has in his mind as though to see what it is, an experiment in dealing with such a matter.

The essays of Addison in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* are combinations of the style of Bacon and that of Cowley. They are short like Bacon's, and they have a personal touch like Cowley's. But Addison gave an immense extension to the field of essay-writing: he chose his subjects from a very wide range. He would not only speculate on Friendship and other such abstract themes, or tell of his own thoughts and feelings. He wrote of anything that came up for the moment. He would discuss the psychology of Instinct or

the beauties of *Paradise Lost*. He would also write as readily about the street cries of London or the patches of court-plaster that the ladies wore on their faces. Some of his essays are almost stories, like some of those on Sir Roger de Coverley; others are descriptions of character; others are moral reflections. As has been said, his influence, or at least that of the *Spectator*, was very great.

There have been during the nineteenth century various other forms of the essay, particularly that made famous by Lord Macaulay, the general but careful treatment of some historical or literary subject. But when Irving began to write, the essay was a series of personal reflections. It might be long or short, it might be on some very general subject or on some special matter, it might even become almost a story; but it was always characterized by thoughts or ideas, rather than events or incidents: and it always retained the privilege of ease and lack of restraint and personality.

An excellent example of Irving's essays is that on Westminster Abbey. Here Irving tells us of a visit made to the Abbey one autumn afternoon. But clearly the interest lies, not in the visit itself, but in the general reflections and ideas presented. In like manner, the essays on Christmas at Bracebridge Hall describe to us certain people and tell of certain doings, but the real interest is in the ideas gathered together about Christmas itself and the old English celebration of it, and the old-time customs and traditions belonging to it. So in the essay on Stratford-on-Avon, although the subject is an especial visit made by Irving to the birthplace of Shakespeare, yet that is but a means by which Irving puts together a number of ideas and reflections concerning the great dramatist and his plays.

Sometimes Irving allowed the narrative character to predominate. Then we have not an essay but a story. Such is the case with the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Of this tale he wrote to his brother: "It is a random thing, suggested by recollections of scenes and stories about Tarrytown. The story is a mere whimsical band to connect the descriptions of scenery, customs, manners, etc." Read the story with this remark in mind and see what an exact characterization it is. "The outline of the story," we are told by his nephew and biographer, "had been sketched more than a year before at Birmingham after a conversation with his brother-in-law, Van Wart, who had been dwelling upon some recollections of his early days at Tarrytown, and had touched upon a waggish fiction of one Brom Bones, a wild blade who professed to fear nothing and boasted of

his having once met the devil on a return from a nocturnal frolic and run a race with him for a bowl of milk punch." In the tale, as we have it, this legend changes a little: Brom Bones tells how he himself raced with the Headless Hessian for a bowl of punch. And finally, in the ride of the unfortunate schoolmaster, the story takes an absurd and burlesque character. But as a story we can easily see how, as Irving says, it is little more than a means for description of manners, scenery, character. This is not so much the case with "Rip Van Winkle." That tale, like the "Legend," is founded upon a slight suggestion—namely, the idea of a sleeper awakened after many years; like the "Legend," also, it is full of descriptions of manners, scenery and character. But the story is held more firmly in mind, even though it is not ordered and condensed into the main thing. If the student will read "Rip Van Winkle" and the "Legend" on one hand, and the "Christmas Dinner" and "Westminster Abbey" on the other, he will see a gradual passage from the short story to the essay, and will be able to understand better just what the essay is.

On the other hand, a few of Irving's essays have little or nothing of this narrative or personal element. "Country Life in England," "Little Britain," "Traits of Indian Character," "John Bull," may be mentioned as examples. Of these, however, it will be noticed that though they have not the touch of story or personal narrative that is easy to perceive in the others, they are on concrete topics rather than on abstract generalities. Bacon wrote generally on such subjects as Truth, Death, Love, Friendship. Cowley was more personal, but he commonly took abstract subjects and wrote of Greatness, Liberty, Solitude. Addison, as has been said, took a wider range; he was immensely interested in the actual world which passed daily before his mind. Still, besides his writings on the English life of his day in town and country, he also wrote with equal ease and pleasure, as it would seem, on the Effects of Avarice, on Friendship, on the Passion for Fame and Praise, on Labor and Exercise and other such matters. But Irving rarely deals with such abstract themes: however general may be his ideas he always attaches them to some particular thing. Indeed, it may be said that his subjects are rarely general. Addison might write on "Popular Superstitions," but Irving preferred the old English customs that he saw still carried out at an English Christmas celebration. Cowley would write on Greatness, but Irving preferred to write on Shakespeare and tell of a visit to Stratford. Bacon would write on Death, but

Irving, if he had anything to say on such a theme, preferred to tell of it as it might be suggested by a visit to Westminster Abbey. In fact, Irving had a keen interest in real life.

This interest is characteristic of him, and may even be called the foundation of his literary character. He wrote much; his histories and biographies are as noteworthy as his stories and essays. All have the same interest in people and their doings. He could write with equal ease of the early days of old New York, or, in different style, of the Alhambra, of George Washington or Oliver Goldsmith, of his own Tour on the Prairies or the Settlement of Astoria, of an English Christmas or the Birthplace of Shakespeare, for all these subjects when they once aroused his interest suffered him to proceed easily with reflections and descriptions of the things that he had seen and knew of. Beyond this he rarely went. He saw everything as literature. He was content to give pictures of life at different times with his own comments and reflections thereon. And as his character was in all respects kindly and lovable, his comments and reflections could not fail to reach the hearts of his readers. Thus it was that he could charm two worlds, for, as Thackeray said of him after his death, he was "the first ambassador whom the New World of Letters sent to the Old."

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

In the Introduction to Part I. of the *Sketch-Book* were given a number of suggestions for the study of Irving's stories. Advice on methods of reading was given, originally formulated by Dr. W. H. Maxwell, and, in connection with the reading, methods of composition were suggested whereby the work in writing was correlated with the study of literature. Further, some details of grammatical study were taken up and explained, and a few suggestions were given from a rhetorical standpoint.

These suggestions were of a general nature, although the examples and illustrations were drawn especially from the stories in the collection. They were such as might be applied to the study of any masterpiece, and will, therefore, serve in introducing the pupil to the essays from the *Sketch-Book* in the following pages. But as it is probable that these selections may fall into the hands of those who have already pursued such studies, or of such as are already fairly well practised in such matters, we shall now offer some fur-

ther suggestions of a different and somewhat more advanced character.

As the earlier studies are more particularly suited to Irving's stories, so these are more appropriate to his essays. They are especially based, in the main, upon the preceding section in the present introduction, which gives a statement of the characteristics of the English essay and of Irving's essays in particular. It will be desirable for the student not merely to read and study that section, but also to appreciate it thoroughly by a comparative study of the essays themselves. To this end the following exercises are offered, in which the essays are studied from the standpoint suggested. The questions may be somewhat varied to suit special circumstances, but it is advised that their character be not changed. They are devised to bring up matters that the pupil may find out from the material at hand, and so to give a power of thought on the matters concerned. Vague, or less definite questions, which give no hint of the line of thought to be followed in answering, should be avoided. "Which of the essays in the *Sketch-Book* interested you most?" "Why do you like Irving's style?" are questions which may stimulate a clever pupil to think over the different essays in a suggestive way. But the average pupil will be unable to answer them to any real purpose. The questions that follow are meant to give a sort of discipline in thinking that will be useful in dealing with other works of literature, or, indeed, with things in general.

I. *What is the main idea of "The Voyage"?*

Such a question should be asked of each essay. The answer may be sought in the following manner:

A. First make an analysis of the essay; that is, a tabular and coördinated statement in very short form of the ideas expressed. We cannot be sure that we know the main idea of the essay unless we know thoroughly what all its ideas are, what is its line of thought. An analysis is to be made as follows:

a. First note the subject (generally in the form of a statement) of each paragraph. The following is such a statement of the subjects of the paragraphs of "The Voyage." The figures represent the paragraphs.

1. The ocean voyage makes us ready for an appreciation of Europe.
2. The voyage is not a transition, but a complete severance.
3. So, at least, it seemed to the writer.

4. Though without customary interests the voyage has its own material for thought.

5. The wonders of the ocean are to be seen or imagined.

6. Ships are to be seen.

7. The fragments of a wreck were especially suggestive.

8. Tales of disaster were suggested by it.

9. Especially to the captain.

10. The captain's story was followed by a storm, fearful on deck;

11. And no less in the cabin.

12. But with a fine day such thoughts vanished.

13. (Transition to paragraph 14.)

14. Land is seen.

15. The ship nears port.

16. Everybody is full of excitement at greeting friends.

17. Except the writer.

b. On looking over this rough abstract, we easily see that the ideas fall into certain groups.

i. The ocean voyage a preparation for Europe. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3.

ii. It stands between the interests of home and those of Europe, having its own detached ideas. Paragraph 4.

(1) Suggested by the general sights at sea. Paragraphs 5, 6.

(2) Suggested by particular incidents, as the wreck (7), which suggested many stories of disaster (8), and especially one to the captain (9).

(3) Suggested by incident of storm (10, 11) and calm (12).

iii. Arrival in port drives away such ideas and suggests a wholly new series of interests. Paragraphs 13-17.

B. When we glance through such an analysis as this, we can see that there is one idea more important than the others. We cannot say that Irving set to work deliberately to develop and present this idea; probably he did not. It is more likely that the idea of the separateness of the ocean, as we may say, the isolation from the land one leaves and that which one comes to, had impressed itself upon his mind, and that when he began to set down his ideas they took about the form of a statement with illustrations. The statement is to be found in (i.) above; the illustrations are in (ii.). But it is pretty clear that Irving had no idea of a definite treatment of an especial subject, for the last part of the essay (iii.) has very little connection with the idea, at least, of the earlier part, and the last sentence brings in a wholly different feeling. Still we must

realize that the essay has a definite subject. It is the presentation of an idea by illustrations that naturally lead to a bit of description.

The idea—the main idea asked for in the question—is that stated in the first and last sentences of paragraph 1: “To an American visiting Europe the long voyage he has to make is an excellent preparative. . . . From the moment you lose sight of the land you have left all is vacancy until you step on the opposite shore, and are launched at once into the bustle and novelties of another world.”

[As has been said, the pupil may carry out work like this with each of the essays in the volume. It is an excellent way of knowing just what an essay is about, to make such an analysis and such a general statement. A word of warning may be given, however: it must be remembered that these essays are all informal and easy treatments of whatever subjects they may deal with. They will never give us perfectly definite and logical developments of thought. That was something Irving cared very little about; and if he had cared for such definiteness, it is not probable that he would have thought it suitable to such work as the *Sketch-Book*. The pupil must then be ready to find one idea after another, often without close connection, and often to find narration or description for its own sake. Still, it is always well to search out whatever connection there is, and to know the idea (if there be any) that the narration or description is meant to impress.]

II. *How is the main idea of “The Voyage” presented?*

To answer the question rightly, the pupil must know—and the teacher may readily explain and illustrate the matter—that authors express their ideas in all sorts of different ways. The scientist will state his idea, perhaps, in the simplest, clearest and shortest form that occurs to him; the novelist may embody his idea in a story or a long novel. The poet will present his idea in all sorts of imaginative or fanciful forms; the philosopher will state his with all sorts of divisions and subdivisions, qualifications and exceptions. What does Irving do?

He does, it will be noted at once, make a fairly definite statement of an idea. The sentences in paragraphs 1 and 2 are general statements giving us an idea, and modifying it till the meaning is clearly before us. If it were merely a matter of conveying an idea that interested Irving, he might well enough have left the matter here. That he does not do so, shows us that the illustrations of

life at sea and the descriptions of landing were matters of quite as much importance to the writer as the thought alone which he presented. Indeed, in some of the essays it often seems as if such illustrations and descriptions were more important than any idea. Just as Irving's stories are often merely means "to connect the descriptions of scenery, customs, manners, etc.," as he said himself, so are his essays often little more than such a combination. An idea suggests a line of thought which he carries on chiefly to have the chance of presenting the attractive pictures and reflections that occur to him.

We may, therefore, say in answer to the question: The main idea is directly and clearly stated, but the greater part of the essay consists in the illustrations of the idea and the descriptions that grow naturally out of it. That is, Irving was not concerned to give us ideas only: he wanted to give us pictures, stories, descriptions, feelings, meditations. What does he say himself? "What, after all, is the mite of wisdom that I could throw into the mass of knowledge; or, how am I sure that my sagest deductions may be safe guides for the opinions of others? But in writing to amuse, if I fail, the only evil is in my own disappointment. If, however, I can by any lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sorrow; if I can now and then penetrate through the gathering film of misanthropy, prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in good humor with his fellow-beings and himself, surely, surely, I shall not then have written entirely in vain" (p. 82).

[This question, like the preceding, may be asked for each one of the essays, and may be followed by asking the pupil to mention one of the pictures by which Irving illustrates his main idea, or one of the meditations, descriptions, etc.]

III. *What other kinds of Essays in English Literature?*

The main facts in answer to this question are stated in the preceding section of the introduction on "The Essay as a Literary Form," but a little further study is needed to get the ideas well in mind. The teacher should have Bacon's *Essays* at hand, and a set of the *Spectator*, or selections from it. Cowley's *Discourses by Way of Essays* may also be accessible, though they will not usually be found in school libraries. With Irving's essay on "Westminster Abbey" we may compare Bacon's essay "On Death," and Addison's account of the "Spectator" on Westminster Abbey, and of his visit to

the abbey with Sir Roger de Coverley. If possible, the teacher may read Cowley on "The Shortness of Life" and Goldsmith's account of Westminster Abbey in the *Citizen of the World*, and, to see how a contemporary handles such a matter, Stevenson's "Aes Triplex" in *Virginibus Puerisque*. Here are a number of essays by different hands, suggested, as it would seem, by the same, or much the same, idea, yet they are very different things, as one can easily see. Exactly what the difference is may be hard to state or even to define for oneself. But a little study of pp. xi, xii of the Introduction, with a comparison of the essays themselves, will enable the pupil to give an intelligible answer to this question. This study may be carried on by such questions as these, founded on p. ix:

Give some of the "short, concise, pithy sentences in Bacon's essay 'On Death.'" What is meant by saying that they "might well stand alone"? Has Irving any such sentences? What kinds of remarks does Irving generally make? Has Bacon any such? How does Bacon's essay "On Death" pass "from point to point with some connection of thought"? What are the thoughts of that essay? Has it any unity? What is its main thought? How is it presented—by statement only or with illustrations?

Further reading of Bacon would show whether the facts discovered by such questions were general or merely accidental in the particular essay studied. And having got in this way an understanding of the kind of essay that Bacon wrote, the pupil is ready to make a statement of what such an essay is and how it differs from the essays of Irving.

IV. *What is the value of Irving's thoughts?*

This question may be answered by itself, the pupil considering carefully some of Irving's ideas and trying to appreciate their value. The previous questions have largely concerned form only; that is, they have considered the mode of expression and not so particularly that which was expressed. But it is always worth while in reading an essayist to free oneself from the question of style and to try to get the value of the thought itself, not only of the main ideas, but of the various minor ideas which occur by the way. Of these latter Irving has not a few, as for example:

. . . "no moral, but the futility of that pride which hopes still to exact homage in its ashes and to live in an inscription," p. 11.

. . . "for, indeed, there is something of companionship between the author and the reader," p. 12.

"Why should we thus seek to clothe death with unnecessary terrors, and to spread horrors round the tomb of those we love?" p. 15.

"How idle a boast after all is the immortality of a name!" p. 21.

Unless we are willing to let such ideas go in at one ear and out at the other, we ought to consider these sentences, to try to appreciate and get the value of their thought. We may either consider them alone or in connection with other thoughts on the same subject. Thus Bacon says:

"Certainly, the contemplation of death as the wages of sin and passage to another world is holy and religious; but the fear of it as a tribute due unto nature is weak."

Addison writes:

"When I look upon the tombs of the great, every emotion of envy dies in me; when I read the epitaphs of the beautiful, every inordinate desire goes out; when I meet with the grief of parents upon a tombstone, my heart melts with compassion; when I see the tomb of the parents themselves, I consider the vanity of grieving for those whom we must quickly follow; when I see kings lying by those who deposed them, when I consider rival wits placed side by side, or the holy men who divided the world with their contests and disputes, I reflect with sorrow and astonishment on the little competitions, factions and debates of mankind."

And in the other essays mentioned, the teacher or pupil will find many such ideas which are at least worth turning over in the mind, that we may know what men of genius have thought on a subject that must some time come to the minds of all.

The pupil may even take one of these sentences as the text for an essay of his own—or, in this special case, it would be better to choose subjects from some other essay. The following are suggested as topics for essays. Let the student consider the idea, first understand it thoroughly, and then explain it, or illustrate it, or confute it, as seems best. He may think that the idea needs only to be stated more fully, and to be understood, for one to agree with it, or disagree. Or he may think he should make it clearer by illustration, or confute it by argument. At any rate, there will generally be found something to say, if the pupil have had some practice in essay writing.

1. "There is something of companionship between the author and the reader," p. 12.

2. "Those honest days of yore, in which, perhaps with equal fat-

lacy, I am apt to think the world was more home-bred, social and joyous than at present," p. 27. Is there an "equal fallacy" here?

3. "But in the depth of winter, when nature lies despoiled of every charm and wrapped in her shroud of sheeted snow, we turn for gratification to moral sources," p. 28.

4. "The world has become more worldly," p. 30. Irving was thinking of the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the question is worth discussing at the beginning of the twentieth.

5. There is "no condition more truly honorable and enviable than that of a country gentleman on his paternal estate," p. 41.

6. "He who has sought renown about the world, and has reaped a full harvest of worldly favor, will find, after all, that there is no love, no admiration, no applause, so sweet to the soul as that which springs up in his native place," p. 103.

THE SKETCH-BOOK

PART II

THE VOYAGE

Ships, ships, I will descree you
Amidst the main,
I will come and try you,
What you are protecting,
And projecting,
What's your end and aim.

One goes abroad for merchandise and trading,
Another stays to keep his country from invading,
A third is coming home with rich and wealthy lading.
Halloo! my fancie, whither wilt thou go?

OLD POEM.

To an American visiting Europe, the long voyage¹ he has to make is an excellent preparative. The temporary absence of worldly scenes and employments produces a state of mind peculiarly fitted to receive new and vivid impressions. The vast space of waters that separates the hemispheres is like a blank page in existence. There is no gradual transition, by which, as in Europe, the features and population of one country blend almost imperceptibly with those of another. From the moment you lose sight of the land you have left, all is vacancy until you step on the opposite shore, and are launched at once into the bustle and novelties of another world.

¹ Irving wrote long before the fast steamships had cut the time of the Atlantic passage down to a few days. He crossed

on a sailing vessel and took more than a month on the voyage.

In traveling by land there is a continuity of scene and a connected succession of persons and incidents, that carry on the story of life, and lessen the effect of absence and separation. We drag, it is true, "a lengthening chain,"¹ at each remove of our pilgrimage; but the chain is unbroken: we can trace it back link by link; and we feel that the last still grapples us to home. But a wide sea voyage severs us at once. It makes us conscious of being cast loose from the secure anchorage of settled life, and sent adrift upon a doubtful world. It interposes a gulf, not merely imaginary, but real, between us and our homes—a gulf subject to tempest and fear and uncertainty, rendering distance palpable, and return precarious.

Such, at least, was the case with myself. As I saw the last blue line of my native land fade away like a cloud in the horizon, it seemed as if I had closed one volume of the world and its concerns, and had time for meditation before I opened another. That land, too, now vanishing from my view, which contained all most dear to me in life; what vicissitudes might occur in it—what changes might take place in me, before I should visit it again! Who can tell, when he sets forth to wander, whither he may be driven by the uncertain currents of existence; or when he may return; or whether it may ever be his lot to revisit the scenes of his childhood?²

I said that at sea all is vacancy; I should correct the expression. To one given to day-dreaming, and fond of losing himself in reveries, a sea voyage is full of subjects for meditation; but then they are the wonders of the deep and of the air, and rather tend to abstract the mind from worldly themes. I delighted to loll over the quarter-railing, or climb

¹ The quotation is from Goldsmith's *Traveller*:

"Where'er I roam, whatever realms to see,
My heart untravell'd fondly turns to thee;
Still to my brother turns with ceaseless pain,

And drags at each remove a lengthening chain."

Irving later in his life wrote a delightful life of Goldsmith.

² Irving did not return to America for seventeen years.

to the main-top¹ of a calm day, and muse for hours together on the tranquil bosom of a summer's sea; to gaze upon the piles of golden clouds just peering above the horizon, fancy them some fairy realms, and people them with a creation of my own;—to watch the gentle undulating billows, rolling their silver volumes, as if to die away on those happy shores.²

There was a delicious sensation of mingled security and awe with which I looked down from my giddy height, on the monsters of the deep at their uncouth gambols. Shoals of porpoises tumbling about the bow of the ship; the grampus³ slowly heaving his huge form above the surface; or the ravenous shark, darting, like a spectre through the blue waters. My imagination would conjure up all that I had heard or read of the watery world beneath me; of the finny herds that roam its fathomless valleys; of the shapeless monsters that lurk among the very foundations of the earth; and of those wild phantasms that swell the tales of fishermen and sailors.

Sometimes a distant sail, gliding along the edge of the ocean, would be another theme of idle speculation. How interesting this fragment of a world, hastening to rejoin the great mass of existence! What a glorious monument of human invention, which has in a manner triumphed over wind and wave, has brought the ends of the world into communion, has established an interchange of blessings, pouring into the sterile regions of the north all the luxuries of the south, has diffused the light of knowledge and the charities of cultivated life, and has thus bound together those scat-

¹ The main-top is the top of the main-mast proper. It is, as Irving says, at a giddy height, although above it are the topsail, the topgallantsail, the royal, and the skysail before one reaches the main-truck or very highest point.

² Such musings are very characteristic

of the form of essay in which Irving excelled. They are not so common to-day although they would be most useful in our age of haste and worry. One should read George William Curtis's *Prue and I*, for a most delightful series of such thoughts.

³ The grampus is a small species of whale.

tered portions of the human race between which nature seemed to have thrown an insurmountable barrier.¹

We one day descried some shapeless object drifting at a distance. At sea everything that breaks the monotony of the surrounding expanse attracts attention. It proved to be the mast of a ship that must have been completely wrecked; for there were the remains of handkerchiefs, by which some of the crew had fastened themselves to this spar, to prevent their being washed off by the waves. There was no trace by which the name of the ship could be ascertained. The wreck had evidently drifted about for many months; clusters of shellfish had fastened about it, and long seaweeds flaunted at its sides. But where, thought I, is the crew? Their struggle has long been over—they have gone down amidst the roar of the tempest—their bones lie whitening among the caverns of the deep. Silence, oblivion, like the waves, have closed over them, and no one can tell the story of their end. What sighs have been wafted after that ship! what prayers offered up at the deserted fireside of home! How often has the mistress, the wife, the mother, pored over the daily news, to catch some casual intelligence of this rover of the deep! How has expectation darkened into anxiety— anxiety into dread—and dread into despair! Alas! not one memento may ever return for love to cherish. All that may ever be known is, that she sailed from her port, “and was never heard of more!”²

The sight of this wreck, as usual, gave rise to many dismal anecdotes. This was particularly the case in the evening, when the weather, which had hitherto been fair, began to look wild and threatening, and gave indications of one of those sudden storms which will sometimes break in upon the serenity of a summer voyage. As we sat round the dull light

¹ In Irving's day, before the railroad, the ocean was a better means of commerce than the land.

² Note reflections somewhat similar in “Westminster Abbey,” p. 20.

of a lamp in the cabin, that made the gloom more ghastly, every one had his tale of shipwreck and disaster. I was particularly struck with a short one related by the captain.

“As I was once sailing,” said he, “in a fine stout ship across the banks of Newfoundland,¹ one of those heavy fogs which prevail in those parts rendered it impossible for us to see far ahead even in the daytime; but at night the weather was so thick that we could not distinguish any object at twice the length of the ship. I kept lights at the masthead, and a constant watch forward to look out for fishing smacks, which are accustomed to lie at anchor on the banks. The wind was blowing a smacking breeze, and we were going at a great rate through the water. Suddenly the watch gave the alarm of ‘a sail ahead!’—it was scarcely uttered before we were upon her. She was a small schooner, at anchor, with her broadside towards us. The crew were all asleep, and had neglected to hoist a light. We struck her just amidships. The force, the size, the weight of our vessel bore her down below the waves; we passed over her and were hurried on our course. As the crashing wreck was sinking beneath us, I had a glimpse of two or three half-naked wretches rushing from her cabin; they just started from their beds to be swallowed shrieking by the waves. I heard their drowning cry mingling with the wind. The blast that bore it to our ears swept us out of all farther hearing. I shall never forget that cry! It was some time before we could put the ship about, she was under such headway. We returned, as nearly as we could guess, to the place where the smack had anchored. We cruised about for several hours in the dense fog. We fired signal guns, and listened if we might hear the halloo of any survivors: but all was silent—we never saw or heard anything of them more.”

I confess these stories, for a time, put an end to all my fine fancies. The storm increased with the night. The sea

¹ The banks of Newfoundland are shoals which are often covered with deep fog.

was lashed into tremendous confusion. There was a fearful sullen sound of rushing waves and broken surges. Deep called unto deep.¹ At times the black column of clouds overhead seemed rent asunder by flashes of lightning which quivered along the foaming billows and made the succeeding darkness doubly terrible. The thunders bellowed over the wild waste of waters, and were echoed and prolonged by the mountain waves. As I saw the ship staggering and plunging among these roaring caverns, it seemed miraculous that she regained her balance or preserved her buoyancy. Her yards would dip into the water: her bow was almost buried beneath the waves. Sometimes an impending surge appeared ready to overwhelm her, and nothing but a dexterous movement of the helm preserved her from the shock.

When I retired to my cabin, the awful scene still followed me. The whistling of the wind through the rigging sounded like funereal wailings. The creaking of the masts, the straining and groaning of bulk-heads, as the ship labored in the weltering sea, were frightful. As I heard the waves rushing along the sides of the ship, and roaring in my very ear, it seemed as if Death were raging round this floating prison, seeking for his prey: the mere starting of a nail, the yawning of a seam, might give him entrance.²

A fine day, however, with a tranquil sea and favoring breeze, soon put all these dismal reflections to flight. It is impossible to resist the gladdening influence of fine weather and fair wind at sea. When the ship is decked out in all her canvas, every sail swelled, and careering gayly over the curling waves, how lofty, how gallant she appears—how she seems to lord it over the deep!

I might fill a volume with the reveries of a sea voyage, for

¹ "Deep calleth unto deep with the noise of thy waterspouts."—Psalm, xlii, 18.

² The mingling of description and reflec-

tion is very characteristic of Irving's essays. It may be noticed especially in the two essays following.

with me it is almost a continual reverie—but it is time to get to shore.

It was a fine sunny morning when the thrilling cry of “Land!” was given from the masthead. None but those who have experienced it can form an idea of the delicious throng of sensations which rush into an American’s bosom when he first comes in sight of Europe. There is a volume of associations with the very name. It is the land of promise, teeming with everything of which his childhood has heard, or on which his studious years have pondered.

From that time until the moment of arrival, it was all feverish excitement. The ships of war¹ that prowled like guardian giants along the coast, the headlands of Ireland stretching out into the channel, the Welsh mountains towering into the clouds,—all were objects of intense interest. As we sailed up the Mersey, I reconnoitred the shores with a telescope. My eye dwelt with delight on neat cottages, with their trim shrubberies and green grass plots. I saw the mouldering ruin of an abbey overrun with ivy, and the taper spire of a village church rising from the brow of a neighboring hill,²—all were characteristic of England.

The tide and wind were so favorable that the ship was enabled to come at once to the pier. It was thronged with people; some, idle lookers-on, others, eager expectants of friends or relatives. I could distinguish the merchant to whom the ship was consigned.³ I knew him by his calculating brow and restless air. His hands were thrust into his pockets; he was whistling thoughtfully and walking to and fro, a small space having been accorded him by the crowd in deference to his temporary importance. There were repeated cheerings and salutations interchanged between the shore and the ship, as friends happened to recognize each

¹ Irving reached Liverpool just after the battle of Waterloo, while England was still at war with France.

“The decent church that topped the neighboring hill.”

³ The ship was directed to his care.

² Cf. Goldsmith’s *Deserted Village* :

other. I particularly noticed one young woman of humble dress but interesting demeanor. She was leaning forward from among the crowd; her eye hurried over the ship as it neared the shore, to catch some wished-for countenance. She seemed disappointed and agitated; when I heard a faint voice call her name. It was from a poor sailor who had been ill all the voyage, and had excited the sympathy of every one on board. When the weather was fine, his messmates had spread a mattress for him on deck in the shade, but of late his illness had so increased that he had taken to his hammock, and only breathed a wish that he might see his wife before he died. He had been helped on deck as we came up the river, and was now leaning against the shrouds, with a countenance so wasted, so pale, so ghastly, that it was no wonder even the eye of affection did not recognize him. But at the sound of his voice, her eye darted on his features; it read at once a whole volume of sorrow; she clasped her hands, uttered a faint shriek, and stood wringing them in silent agony.

All now was hurry and bustle. The meetings of acquaintances—the greetings of friends—the consultations of men of business. I alone was solitary and idle. I had no friend to meet, no cheering to receive. I stepped upon the land of my forefathers¹—but I felt that I was a stranger in the land.

¹ Irving's feelings were not sentimental only: his father came from the Orkneys, his mother from the south of England.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

When I behold, with deep astonishment,
 To famous Westminster how there resorte
 Living in brasse or stoney monument,
 The princes and the worthies of all sorte;
 Doe not I see reformde nobilitie,
 Without contempt, or pride, or ostentation,
 And looke upon offenselesse majesty,
 Naked of pomp or earthly domination?
 And how a play-game of a painted stone
 Contents the quiet now and silent sprites,
 Whome all the world which late they stood upon
 Could not content or quench their appetites.
 Life is a frost of cold felicitie,
 And death the thaw of all our vanitie.

CHRISTOLERO'S EPIGRAMS, BY T. B., 1598.

ON one of those sober and rather melancholy days in the latter part of autumn, when the shadows of morning and evening almost mingle together and throw a gloom over the decline of the year, I passed several hours in rambling about Westminster Abbey.¹ There was something congenial to the season in the mournful magnificence of the old pile; and as I passed its threshold it seemed like stepping back into the regions of antiquity and losing myself among the shades of former ages.

I entered from the inner court of Westminster School,² through a long, low, vaulted passage that had an almost subterranean look, being dimly lighted in one part by circular perforations in the massive walls. Through this dark avenue I had a distant view of the cloisters,³ with the figure of

¹ Westminster, which is now wholly included in London, was formerly a separate town named from the great abbey church around which it grew up. The cathedral itself is very ancient as will be seen from Irving's note at the end of the essay.

² Westminster school is one of the great

English boarding schools. It was established in the Abbey by Henry VIII.

³ Cloisters (as may be observed from the derivation of the name) are a feature peculiarly appropriate to monastic architecture. The abbey was formerly a monastery church.

an old verger in his black gown moving along their shadowy vaults, and seeming like a spectre from one of the neighboring tombs. The approach to the abbey through these gloomy monastic remains prepares the mind for its solemn contemplation. The cloisters still retain something of the quiet and seclusion of former days. The gray walls are discolored by damps and crumbling with age; a coat of hoary moss has gathered over the inscriptions of the mural monuments and obscured the death's head and other funereal emblems. The sharp touches of the chisel are gone from the rich tracery of the arches; the roses which adorned the keystones have lost their leafy beauty; everything bears marks of the gradual dilapidations of time, which yet has something touching and pleasing in its very decay.

The sun was pouring down a yellow autumnal ray into the square of the cloisters; beaming upon a scanty plot of grass in the centre, and lighting up an angle of the vaulted passage with a kind of dusky splendor. From between the arcades the eye glanced up to a bit of blue sky or a passing cloud and beheld the sun-gilt pinnacles of the abbey towering into the azure heaven.

As I paced the cloisters, sometimes contemplating this mingled picture of glory and decay, and sometimes endeavoring to decipher the inscriptions on the tombstones which formed the pavement beneath my feet, my eye was attracted to three figures, rudely carved in relief, but nearly worn away by the footsteps of many generations. They were the effigies of three of the early abbots; the epitaphs were entirely effaced; the names alone remained, having no doubt been renewed in later times: Vitalis. Abbas. 1082, and Gislebertus Crispinus. Abbas. 1114, and Laurentius. Abbas. 1176.¹ I remained some little while musing over these casual² relics of antiquity thus left like wrecks upon this distant shore of

¹ These dates go back, it will be observed, almost to the Norman Conquest (1066).

² preserved by chance.

time, telling no tale but that such beings had been, and had perished; teaching no moral but the futility of that pride which hopes still to exact homage in its ashes and to live in an inscription. A little longer and even these faint records will be obliterated, and the monument will cease to be a memorial. Whilst I was yet looking down upon these gravestones I was roused by the sound of the abbey clock reverberating from buttress to buttress and echoing among the cloisters. It is almost startling to hear this warning of departed time sounding among the tombs and telling the lapse of the hour, which, like a billow, has rolled us onward towards the grave. I pursued my walk to an arched door opening to the interior of the abbey. On entering here the magnitude of the building breaks fully upon the mind, contrasted with the vaults of the cloisters. The eyes gaze with wonder at clustered columns of gigantic dimensions,¹ with arches springing from them to such an amazing height, and man wandering about their bases, shrunk into insignificance in comparison with his own handiwork. The spaciousness and gloom of this vast edifice produce a profound and mysterious awe. We step cautiously and softly about, as if fearful of disturbing the hallowed silence of the tomb; while every footfall whispers along the walls and chatters among the sepulchres,² making us more sensible of the quiet we have interrupted.

It seems as if the awful nature of the place presses down upon the soul and hushes the beholder into noiseless reverence. We feel that we are surrounded by the congregated bones of the great men of past times who have filled history with their deeds and the earth with their renown.

¹ The Gothic architecture, in the case of a cathedral, has for a main feature lofty columns, from which rise pointed arches supporting the roof. In Westminster Abbey these columns are not simple, but made up in appearance of a number of

smaller columns grouped together.

² As in most ancient churches the aisles and chapels of Westminster Abbey are full of tombs. Here have been buried the great men of England for many generations.

And yet it almost provokes a smile at the vanity of human ambition to see how they are crowded together and jostled in the dust; what parsimony is observed in doling out a scanty nook, a gloomy corner, a little portion of earth, to those whom, when alive, kingdoms could not satisfy; and how many shapes and forms and artifices are devised to catch the casual notice of the passenger, and save from forgetfulness for a few short years a name which once aspired to occupy ages of the world's thought and admiration.

I passed some time in Poets' Corner,¹ which occupies an end of one of the transepts or cross aisles of the abbey. The monuments are generally simple, for the lives of literary men afford no striking themes for the sculptor. Shakespeare and Addison have statues erected to their memories, but the greater part have busts, medallions, and sometimes mere inscriptions. Notwithstanding the simplicity of these memorials, I have always observed that the visitors to the abbey remained longest about them. A kinder and fonder feeling takes place of that cold curiosity or vague admiration with which they gaze on the splendid monuments of the great and the heroic. They linger about these as about the tombs of friends and companions; for indeed there is something of companionship between the author and the reader. Other men are known to posterity only through the medium of history, which is continually growing faint and obscure; but the intercourse between the author and his fellow-men is ever new, active, and immediate. He has lived for them more than for himself; he has sacrificed surrounding enjoyments and shut himself up from the delights of social life, that he might the more intimately commune with distant minds and distant ages. Well may the world cherish his renown; for it has been purchased, not by deeds of violence and blood, but by the diligent dispensation of pleasure. Well may posterity

¹ Poet's Corner is in the South Transept of the Abbey, where for a long time men of letters have been buried.

be grateful to his memory; for he has left it an inheritance, not of empty names and sounding actions, but whole treasures of wisdom, bright gems of thought, and golden veins of language.

From Poet's Corner I continued my stroll towards that part of the abbey which contains the sepulchres of the kings. I wandered among what once were chapels, but which are now occupied by the tombs and monuments of the great. At every turn I met with some illustrious name, or the cognizance of some powerful house renowned in history. As the eye darts into these dusky chambers of death it catches glimpses of quaint effigies: some kneeling in niches, as if in devotion; others stretched upon the tombs, with hands piously pressed together; warriors in armor, as if reposing after battle; prelates with crosiers and mitres; and nobles in robes and coronets, lying as it were in state. In glancing over this scene, so strangely populous, yet where every form is so still and silent, it seems almost as if we were treading a mansion of that fabled city where every being had been suddenly transmuted into stone.

I paused to contemplate a tomb on which lay the effigy of a knight in complete armor. A large buckler was on one arm; the hands were pressed together in supplication upon the breast; the face was almost covered by the morion; the legs were crossed, in token of the warrior's having been engaged in the holy war. It was the tomb of a crusader; of one of those military enthusiasts who so strangely mingled religion and romance, and whose exploits form the connecting link between fact and fiction, between the history and the fairy tale. There is something extremely picturesque in the tombs of these adventurers, decorated as they are with rude armorial bearings and Gothic sculpture.¹ They comport

¹ The sculpture of the Middle Ages, as well as its architecture, is loosely called Gothic, although it was only at the begin-

ning of that period that the Goths were a powerful people.

with the antiquated chapels in which they are generally found; and in considering them the imagination is apt to kindle with the legendary associations, the romantic fiction, the chivalrous pomp and pageantry which poetry has spread over the wars for the sepulchre of Christ. They are the relics of time utterly gone by, of beings passed from recollection, of customs and manners with which ours have no affinity. They are like objects from some strange and distant land of which we have no certain knowledge, and about which all our conceptions are vague and visionary. There is something extremely solemn and awful in those effigies on Gothic tombs, extended as if in the sleep of death, or in the supplication of the dying hour. They have an effect infinitely more impressive on my feelings than the fanciful attitudes, the overwrought conceits, and allegorical groups which abound on modern monuments. I have been struck, also, with the superiority of many of the old sepulchral inscriptions. There was a noble way, in former times, of saying things simply, and yet saying them proudly; and I do not know an epitaph that breathes a loftier consciousness of family worth and honorable lineage than one which affirms of a noble house that "all the brothers were brave and all the sisters virtuous."¹

In the opposite transept to Poet's Corner stands a monument which is among the most renowned achievements of modern art, but which to me appears horrible rather than sublime. It is the tomb of Mrs. Nightingale, by Roubiliac.² The bottom of the monument is represented as throwing open its marble doors, and a sheeted skeleton is starting forth. The shroud is falling from his fleshless frame as he launches his dart at his victim. She is sinking into her affrighted husband's arms, who strives with vain and frantic effort to

¹ Irving gives the epitaph in the note on p. 25.

² Roubillac, as the name is more cor-

rectly spelled, was a French sculptor (1695-1762) who, toward the end of his life, executed many statues in England.

avert the blow. The whole is executed with terrible truth and spirit; we almost fancy we hear the gibbering yell of triumph bursting from the distended jaws of the spectre. But why should we thus seek to clothe death with unnecessary terrors, and to spread horrors round the tomb of those we love? The grave should be surrounded by everything that might inspire tenderness and veneration for the dead, or that might win the living to virtue. It is the place, not of disgust and dismay, but of sorrow and meditation.

While wandering about these gloomy vaults and silent aisles, studying the records of the dead, the sound of busy existence from without occasionally reaches the ear,—the rumbling of the passing equipage, the murmur of the multitude, or perhaps the light laugh of pleasure. The contrast is striking with the deathlike repose around; and it has a strange effect upon the feelings thus to hear the surges of active life hurrying along and beating against the very walls of the sepulchre.

I continued in this way to move from tomb to tomb and from chapel to chapel. The day was gradually wearing away; the distant tread of loiterers about the abbey grew less and less frequent; the sweet-tongued bell was summoning to evening prayers; and I saw at a distance the choristers in their white surplices crossing the aisle and entering the choir. I stood before the entrance to Henry the Seventh's Chapel.¹ A flight of steps lead up to it, through a deep and gloomy but magnificent arch. Great gates of brass, richly and delicately wrought, turn heavily upon their hinges, as if proudly reluctant to admit the feet of common mortals into this most gorgeous of sepulchres.

On entering, the eye is astonished by the pomp of architecture and the elaborate beauty of sculptured detail. The very walls are wrought into universal ornament, incrustated with tracery, and scooped into niches crowded with the

¹ Henry the Seventh's Chapel is an example of very elaborate late Gothic architecture.

statues of saints and martyrs. Stone seems by the cunning labor of the chisel to have been robbed of its weight and density, suspended aloft as if by magic, and the fretted roof achieved with the wonderful minuteness and airy security of a cobweb.¹

Along the sides of the chapel are the lofty stalls of the Knights of the Bath,² richly carved of oak, though with the grotesque decorations of Gothic architecture. On the pinnacles of the stalls are affixed the helmets and crests of the knights, with their scarfs and swords; and above them are suspended their banners, emblazoned with armorial bearings, and contrasting the splendor of gold and purple and crimson with the cold gray fretwork of the roof. In the midst of this grand mausoleum stands the sepulchre of its founder, —his effigy, with that of his queen, extended on a sumptuous tomb, and the whole surrounded by a superbly wrought brazen railing.

There is a sad dreariness in this magnificence, this strange mixture of tombs and trophies, these emblems of living and aspiring ambition close beside mementoes which show the dust and oblivion in which all must sooner or later terminate. Nothing impresses the mind with a deeper feeling of loneliness than to tread the silent and deserted scene of former throng and pageant. On looking round on the vacant stalls of the knights and their esquires, and on the rows of dusty but gorgeous banners that were once borne before them, my imagination conjured up the scene when this hall was bright with the valor and beauty of the land; glittering with the splendor of jewelled rank and military array; alive with the tread of many feet and the hum of an admiring multitude. All had passed away; the silence of death had settled again upon the place, interrupted only by the casual chirping of

¹ One of the noteworthy features of the chapel is its roof and ceiling, in which the keystones of the vaults have considerable pendants which are elaborately

carved, giving the effect described above.

² One of the English orders of Knighthood, second in dignity only to that of the Garter.

birds which had found their way into the chapel and built their nests among its friezes and pendants—sure signs of solitariness and desertion.

When I read the names inscribed on the banners, they were those of men scattered far and wide about the world; some tossing upon distant seas, some under arms in distant lands, some mingling in the busy intrigues of courts and cabinets, all seeking to deserve one more distinction in this mansion of shadowy honors,—the melancholy reward of a monument.

Two small aisles on each side of this chapel present a touching instance of the equality of the grave, which brings down the oppressor to a level with the oppressed, and mingles the dust of the bitterest enemies together. In one is the sepulchre of the haughty Elizabeth; in the other is that of her victim, the lovely and unfortunate Mary.¹ Not an hour in the day but some ejaculation of pity is uttered over the fate of the latter, mingled with indignation at her oppressor. The walls of Elizabeth's sepulchre continually echo with the sighs of sympathy heaved at the grave of her rival.

A peculiar melancholy reigns over the aisle where Mary lies buried. The light struggles dimly through windows darkened by dust. The greater part of the place is in deep shadow, and the walls are stained and tinted by time and weather. A marble figure of Mary is stretched upon the tomb, round which is an iron railing, much corroded, bearing her national emblem—the thistle. I was weary with wandering, and sat down to rest myself by the monument, revolving in my mind the checkered and disastrous story of poor Mary.

The sound of casual footsteps had ceased from the abbey. I could only hear, now and then, the distant voice of the priest repeating the evening service, and the faint responses

¹ Mary, Queen of Scots, was beheaded in 1587 for conspiracy against Elizabeth. She was the heir presumptive to the English

throne, and had claimed it long before on the ground of Elizabeth's illegitimacy.

of the choir; these paused for a time, and all was hushed. The stillness, the desertion and obscurity that were gradually prevailing around, gave a deeper and more solemn interest to the place:

For in the silent grave no conversation,
No joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers,
No careful father's counsel—nothing's heard,
For nothing is, but all oblivion,
Dust, and an endless darkness.¹

Suddenly the notes of the deep-laboring organ burst upon the ear, falling with doubled and redoubled intensity, and rolling, as it were, huge billows of sound. How well do their volume and grandeur accord with this mighty building! With what pomp do they swell through its vast vaults and breathe their awful harmony through these caves of death, and make the silent sepulchre vocal!—And now they rise in triumph and acclamation, heaving higher and higher their accordant notes, and piling sound on sound.—And now they pause, and the soft voices of the choir break out into sweet gushes of melody; they soar aloft and warble along the roof, and seem to play about these lofty vaults like the pure airs of heaven. Again the pealing organ heaves its thrilling thunders, compressing air into music, and rolling it forth upon the soul. What long-drawn cadences! What solemn sweeping concords! It grows more and more dense and powerful—it fills the vast pile, and seems to jar the very walls—the ear is stunned—the senses are overwhelmed. And now it is winding up in full jubilee—it is rising from the earth to heaven—the very soul seems rapt away and floated upwards on this swelling tide of harmony!²

¹ From Beaumont and Fletcher's *Thierry and Theodore*. One of the many mottoes and quotations in the Sketch Book that show Irving's delight in the writers of the early 17th century.

² Compare *Il Penseroso*:
"There let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high and anthem clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heaven before my eyes."

I sat for some time lost in that kind of reverie which a strain of music is apt¹ sometimes to inspire; the shadows of evening were gradually thickening round me, the monuments began to cast deeper and deeper gloom, and the distant clock again gave token of the slowly waning day.

I rose and prepared to leave the abbey. As I descended the flight of steps which lead into the body of the building, my eye was caught by the shrine of Edward the Confessor,² and I ascended the small staircase that conducts to it, to take from thence a general survey of this wilderness of tombs. The shrine is elevated upon a kind of platform, and close around it are the sepulchres of various kings and queens. From this eminence the eye looks down between pillars and funeral trophies to the chapels and chambers below, crowded with tombs, where warriors, prelates, courtiers, and statesmen lie mouldering in their "beds of darkness." Close by me stood the great chair of coronation, rudely carved of oak in the barbarous taste of a remote and Gothic age. The scene seemed almost as if contrived with theatrical artifice to produce an effect upon the beholder. Here was a type of the beginning and the end of human pomp and power; here it was literally but a step from the throne to the sepulchre. Would not one think that these incongruous mementoes had been gathered together as a lesson to living greatness?—to show it, even in the moment of its proudest exaltation, the neglect and dishonor to which it must soon arrive; how soon that crown which encircles its brow must pass away, and it must lie down in the dust and disgraces of the tomb, and be trampled upon by the feet of the meanest of the multitude. For, strange to tell, even the grave is here no longer a sanctuary. There is a shocking levity in some natures which leads them to sport with awful and hallowed things;

¹ The use of the word with "sometimes" shows an earlier meaning now often forgotten.

² The last of the Anglo-Saxon kings, except for Harold who was defeated by William the Conqueror.

and there are base minds which delight to revenge on the illustrious dead the abject homage and groveling servility which they pay to the living. The coffin of Edward the Confessor has been broken open, and his remains despoiled of their funereal ornaments; the sceptre has been stolen from the hand of the imperious Elizabeth, and the effigy of Henry the Fifth lies headless. Not a royal monument but bears some proof how false and fugitive is the homage of mankind. Some are plundered, some mutilated, some covered with ribaldry and insult—all more or less outraged and dishonored!

The last beams of day were now faintly streaming through the painted windows in the high vaults above me; the lower parts of the abbey were already wrapped in the obscurity of twilight. The chapels and aisles grew darker and darker. The effigies of the kings faded into shadows, the marble figures of the monuments assumed strange shapes in the uncertain light, the evening breeze crept through the aisles like the cold breath of the grave, and even the distant footfall of a verger traversing the Poets' Corner had something strange and dreary in its sound. I slowly retraced my morning's walk, and as I passed out at the portal of the cloisters, the door closing with a jarring noise behind me filled the whole building with echoes.

I endeavored to form some arrangement in my mind of the objects I had been contemplating, but found they were already fallen into indistinctness and confusion. Names, inscriptions, trophies, had all become confounded in my recollection, though I had scarcely taken my foot from off the threshold. What, thought I, is this vast assemblage of sepulchres but a treasury of humiliation; a huge pile of reiterated homilies on the emptiness of renown and the certainty of oblivion! It is indeed the empire of death; his great shadowy palace where he sits in state mocking at the relics of human glory, and spreading dust and forgetfulness

on the monuments of princes. How idle a boast, after all, is the immortality of a name! Time is ever silently turning over his pages; we are too much engrossed by the story of the present to think of the characters and anecdotes that gave interest to the past; and each age is a volume thrown aside to be speedily forgotten. The idol of to-day pushes the hero of yesterday out of our recollection; and will in turn be supplanted by his successor of to-morrow. "Our fathers," says Sir Thomas Browne,¹ "find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors." History fades into fable, fact becomes clouded with doubt and controversy, the inscription moulders from the tablet, the statue falls from the pedestal. Columns, arches, pyramids—what are they but heaps of sand? and their epitaphs, but characters written in the dust? What is the security of a tomb, or the perpetuity of an embalmment? The remains of Alexander the Great have been scattered to the wind, and his empty sarcophagus is now the mere curiosity of a museum. "The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyzes or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth; Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsam."²

What then is to insure this pile which now towers above me from sharing the fate of mightier mausoleums? The time must come when its gilded vaults which now spring so loftily shall lie in rubbish beneath the feet; when instead of the sound of melody and praise, the wind shall whistle through the broken arches and the owl hoot from the shattered tower—when the garish sunbeam shall break into these gloomy mansions of death, and the ivy twine round the fallen column; and the foxglove hang its blossoms about the name-

¹ Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), a writer of the 17th century, whose prose has the character of dignity and quaintness. This passage and that following are taken from a piece entitled *The Urn-burial*, a reflection on death inspired by the dis-

covery of some Roman funereal urns.

² The allusion is to a supposed use of mummies in medicine: the gums or liquors used in the process of embalming were imagined to have peculiar virtues.

less urn, as if in mockery of the dead. Thus man passes away; his name perishes from record and recollection; his history is as a tale that is told, and his very monument becomes a ruin.

NOTES CONCERNING WESTMINSTER ABBEY

[These notes were added by Irving in an Appendix, but it seems appropriate that they should follow immediately the extract which suggested them.]

Toward the end of the sixth century, when Britain under the dominion of the Saxons was in a state of barbarism and idolatry, Pope Gregory the Great, struck with the beauty of some Anglo-Saxon youths exposed for sale in the market place at Rome, conceived a fancy for the race, and determined to send missionaries to preach the gospel among these comely but benighted islanders. He was encouraged to this by learning that Ethelbert, king of Kent and the most potent of the Anglo-Saxon princes, had married Bertha, a Christian princess, only daughter of the king of Paris, and that she was allowed by stipulation the full exercise of her religion.

The shrewd pontiff knew the influence of the sex in matters of religious faith. He forthwith despatched Augustine, a Roman monk, with forty associates to the court of Ethelbert at Canterbury, to effect the conversion of the king and to obtain through him a foothold in the island.

Ethelbert received them warily and held a conference in the open air, being distrustful of foreign priestcraft and fearful of spells and magic. They ultimately succeeded in making him as good a Christian as his wife. The conversion of the king of course produced the conversion of his loyal subjects. The zeal and success of Augustine were rewarded by his being made Archbishop of Canterbury and being endowed with authority over all the British churches.

One of the most prominent converts was Segebert, or Sebert, king of the East Saxons, a nephew of Ethelbert. He reigned at London, of which Mellitus, one of the Roman monks who had come over with Augustine, was made bishop.

Sebert, in 605, in his religious zeal, founded a monastery by the riverside to the west of the city, on the ruins of a temple of Apollo, being, in fact, the origin of the present pile of Westminster Abbey. Great preparations were made for the consecration of the church, which was to be dedicated to St. Peter. On the morning of the

appointed day, Mellitus, the bishop, proceeded with great pomp and solemnity to perform the ceremony. On approaching the edifice he was met by a fisherman, who informed him that it was needless to proceed as the ceremony was over. The bishop stared with surprise, when the fisherman went on to relate that the night before, as he was in his boat on the Thames, St. Peter appeared to him and told him that he intended to consecrate the church himself that very night. The apostle accordingly went into the church, which suddenly became illuminated. The ceremony was performed in sumptuous style, accompanied by strains of heavenly music and clouds of fragrant incense. After this the apostle came into the boat and ordered the fisherman to cast his net. He did so, and had a miraculous draught of fishes, one of which he was commanded to present to the bishop, and to signify to him that the apostle had relieved him from the necessity of consecrating the church.

Mellitus was a wary man, slow of belief, and required confirmation of the fisherman's tale. He opened the church doors and beheld wax candles, crosses, holy water, oil sprinkled in various places, and various other traces of a grand ceremonial. If he had still any lingering doubts, they were completely removed on the fisherman's producing the identical fish which he had been ordered by the apostle to present to him. To resist this would have been to resist ocular demonstration. The good bishop accordingly was convinced that the church had actually been consecrated by St. Peter in person, so he reverently abstained from proceeding further in the business.

The foregoing tradition is said to be the reason why King Edward the Confessor chose this place as the site of a religious house which he meant to endow. He pulled down the old church and built another in its place in 1045. In this his remains were deposited in a magnificent shrine.

The sacred edifice again underwent modifications, if not a reconstruction, by Henry III., in 1220, and began to assume its present appearance.

Under Henry VIII. it lost its conventual character, that monarch turning the monks away and seizing upon the revenues.

RELICS OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

A curious narrative was printed in 1688 by one of the choristers of the cathedral, who appears to have been the Paul Pry of the

sacred edifice, giving an account of his rummaging among the bones of Edward the Confessor, after they had quietly reposed in their sepulchre upwards of six hundred years, and of his drawing forth the crucifix and golden chain of the deceased monarch. During eighteen years that he had officiated in the choir, it had been a common tradition, he says, among his brother choristers and the gray-headed servants of the abbey, that the body of King Edward was deposited in a kind of chest, or coffin, which was indistinctly seen in the upper part of the shrine erected to his memory. None of the Abbey gossips, however, had ventured upon a nearer inspection, until the worthy narrator to gratify his curiosity mounted to the coffin by the aid of a ladder, and found it to be made of wood, apparently very strong and firm, being secured by bands of iron.

Subsequently, in 1685, on taking down the scaffolding used in the coronation of James II., the coffin was found to be broken, a hole appearing in the lid, probably made through accident by the workmen. No one ventured, however, to meddle with the sacred depository of royal dust, until, several weeks afterwards, the circumstance came to the knowledge of the aforesaid chorister. He forthwith repaired to the abbey in company with two friends of congenial tastes who were desirous of inspecting the tombs. Procuring a ladder he again mounted to the coffin, and found, as had been represented, a hole in the lid about six inches long and four inches broad, just in front of the left breast. Thrusting in his hand, and groping among the bones, he drew from underneath the shoulder a crucifix richly adorned and enameled, affixed to a gold chain twenty-four inches long. These he showed to his inquisitive friends, who were equally surprised with himself.

“At the time,” says he, “when I took the cross and chain out of the coffin, *I drew the head to the hole and viewed it*, being very sound and firm, with the upper and nether jaws whole and full of teeth, and a list of gold above an inch broad, in the nature of a coronet, surrounding the temples. There was also in the coffin white linen and gold-colored flowered silk that looked indifferent fresh, but the least stress put thereto showed it was well-nigh perished. There were all his bones, and much dust likewise, which I left as I found.”

It is difficult to conceive a more grotesque lesson to human pride than the skull of Edward the Confessor thus irreverently pulled about in its coffin by a prying chorister, and brought to grin face to face with him through a hole in the lid!

Having satisfied his curiosity, the chorister put the crucifix and

chain back again into the coffin, and sought the dean, to apprise him of his discovery. The dean not being accessible at the time, and fearing that the "holy treasure" might be taken away by other hands, he got a brother chorister to accompany him to the shrine about two or three hours afterwards, and in his presence again drew forth the relics. These he afterwards delivered on his knees to King James. The king subsequently had the old coffin enclosed in a new one of great strength, "each plank being two inches thick and cramped together with large iron wedges, where it now remains (1688) as a testimony of his pious care, that no abuse might be offered to the sacred ashes therein deposited."

As the history of this shrine is full of moral, I subjoin a description of it in modern times. "The solitary and forlorn shrine," says a British writer, "now stands a mere skeleton of what it was. A few faint traces of its sparkling decorations inlaid on solid mortar catch the rays of the sun, forever set on its splendor. . . . Only two of the spiral pillars remain. The wooden Ionic top is much broken and covered with dust. The mosaic is picked away in every part within reach; only the lozenges of about a foot square and five circular pieces of the rich marble remain."—*Malcolm, Lond. rediv.*

INSCRIPTION ON A MONUMENT ALLUDED TO IN THE SKETCH

Here lyes the Loyal Duke of Newcastle, and his Duchess his second wife, by whom he had no issue. Her name was Margaret Lucas, youngest sister to the Lord Lucas of Colchester, a noble family; for all the brothers were valiant, and all the sisters virtuous. This Duchess was a wise, witty, and learned lady, which her many Bookes do well testify: she was a most virtuous, and loving and careful wife, and was with her lord all the time of his banishment and miseries, and when he came home, never parted from him in his solitary retirement.

In the winter time, when the days are short, the service in the afternoon is performed by the light of tapers. The effect is fine of the choir partially lighted up, while the main body of the cathedral and the transepts are in profound and cavernous darkness. The white dresses of the choristers gleam amidst the deep brown of the open slats and canopies. The partial illumination makes enormous

shadows from columns and screens, and darting into the surrounding gloom catches here and there upon a sepulchral decoration or monumental effigy. The swelling notes of the organ accord well with the scene.

When the service is over, the dean is lighted to his dwelling in the old conventual part of the pile by the boys of the choir in their white dresses, bearing tapers, and the procession passes through the abbey and along the shadowy cloisters, lighting up angles and arches and grim sepulchral monuments, and leaving all behind in darkness.

On entering the cloisters at night from what is called the Dean's Yard, the eye ranging through a dark vaulted passage catches a distant view of a white marble figure reclining on a tomb, on which a strong glare thrown by a gas light has quite a spectral effect. It is a mural monument of one of the Pultneys.

CHRISTMAS

But is old, old, good old Christmas gone? Nothing but the hair of his good, gray old head and beard left? Well, I will have that, seeing I cannot have more of him.

HUE AND CRY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

A man might then behold
 At Christmas, in each hall
 Good fires to curb the cold,
 And meat for great and small.
 The neighbors were friendly bidden,
 And all had welcome true,
 The poor from the gates were not chidden
 When this old cap was new.

OLD SONG.¹

NOTHING in England exercises a more delightful spell over my imagination than the lingerings of the holiday customs and rural games of former times.² They recall the pictures

¹ *Time's Alterations*, the poem from which this stanza is taken, belongs to one of the many collections of songs of the first half of the 17th century.

² This piece, even more than the preceding, is characteristic of one element in Irving's literary make-up, the fascination had for him by the past. One would

my fancy used to draw in the May morning of life, when as yet I only knew the world through books, and believed it to be all that poets had painted it; and they bring with them the flavor of those honest days of yore, in which, perhaps with equal fallacy, I am apt to think the world was more home-bred, social, and joyous than at present.¹ I regret to say that they are daily growing more and more faint, being gradually worn away by time, but still more obliterated by modern fashion. They resemble those picturesque morsels of Gothic architecture² which we see crumbling in various parts of the country, partly dilapidated by the waste of ages, and partly lost in the additions and alterations of later days. Poetry, however, clings with cherishing fondness about the rural game and holiday revel from which it has derived so many of its themes—as the ivy winds its rich foliage about the Gothic arch and mouldering tower, gratefully repaying their support by clasping together their tottering remains, and, as it were, embalming them in verdure.

Of all the old festivals, however, that of Christmas awakens the strongest and most heartfelt associations. There is a tone of solemn and sacred feeling that blends with our conviviality, and lifts the spirit to a state of hallowed and elevated enjoyment. The services of the Church about this season are extremely tender and inspiring. They dwell on the beautiful story of the origin of our faith, and the pastoral³ scenes that accompanied its announcement. They gradually increase in fervor and pathos during the season of Advent, until they break forth in full jubilee on the morning that brought peace and good-will to men. I do not know a

almost say that he felt that in leaving America for England he was going from the actual world of everyday doings to a delightful region of the imagination. At any rate he loved old places, old legends and old usages, of which these papers on Bracebridge Hall give especial evidence.

¹ It is a curious comment upon this opinion that the writer of the old song quoted, like Irving, thinks that bygone days were better than his own.

² See p. 11, note.

³ connected with shepherd life.

grander effect of music on the moral feelings than to hear the full choir and the pealing organ performing a Christmas anthem in a cathedral, and filling every part of the vast pile with triumphant harmony.

It is a beautiful arrangement, also, derived from days of yore, that this festival which commemorates the announcement of the religion of peace and love has been made the season for gathering together of family connections, and drawing closer again those bands of kindred hearts, which the cares and pleasures and sorrows of the world are continually operating to cast loose; of calling back the children of a family who have launched forth in life and wandered widely asunder, once more to assemble about the paternal hearth, that rallying place of the affections, there to grow young and loving again among the endearing mementoes of childhood.

There is something in the very season of the year that gives a charm to the festivity of Christmas. At other times we derive a great portion of our pleasures from the mere beauties of nature. Our feelings sally forth and dissipate themselves over the sunny landscape, and we "live abroad and everywhere." The song of the bird, the murmur of the stream, the breathing fragrance of spring, the soft voluptuousness of summer, the golden pomp of autumn, earth with its mantle of refreshing green, and heaven with its deep delicious blue and its cloudy magnificence,—all fill us with mute but exquisite delight, and we revel in the luxury of mere sensation. But in the depth of winter, when nature lies despoiled of every charm and wrapped in her shroud of sheeted snow,¹ we turn for our gratifications to moral sources. The dreariness and desolation of the landscape, the short gloomy days and darksome nights, while they circumscribe

¹ The hatred of winter is thoroughly characteristic of the Middle Ages, which were to Irving the period of romance. At the present day we have got better used to

winter and can appreciate its beauty better than people could when they could not keep warm. Anyone who cannot, should read Lowell's *A Good Word for Winter*.

our wanderings, shut in our feelings also from rambling abroad, and make us more keenly disposed for the pleasure of the social circle. Our thoughts are more concentrated, our friendly sympathies more aroused. We feel more sensibly the charm of each other's society, and are brought more closely together by dependence on each other for enjoyment. Heart calleth unto heart; and we draw our pleasures from the deep wells of loving-kindness which lie in the quiet recesses of our bosoms, and which, when resorted to, furnish forth the pure element of domestic felicity.

The pitchy gloom without makes the heart dilate on entering the room filled with the glow and warmth of the evening fire. The ruddy blaze diffuses an artificial summer and sunshine through the room, and lights up each countenance in a kindlier welcome. Where does the honest face of hospitality expand into a broader and more cordial smile—where is the shy glance of love more sweetly eloquent—than by the winter fireside? and as the hollow blast of wintry wind rushes through the hall, claps the distant door, whistles about the casement, and rumbles down the chimney, what can be more grateful than that feeling of sober and sheltered security with which we look round upon the comfortable chamber and the scene of domestic hilarity?

The English, from the great prevalence of rural habit¹ throughout every class of society, have always been fond of those festivals and holidays which agreeably interrupt the stillness of country life; and they were in former days particularly observant of the religious and social rites of Christmas. It is inspiring to read even the dry details which some antiquaries have given of the quaint humors, the burlesque pageants, the complete abandonment to mirth and good-fellowship with which this festival was celebrated. It seemed to throw open every door and unlock every heart. It brought

¹ The English gentry, in Irving's day, lived largely in the country, even though they might come to town for business or pleasure.

the peasant and the peer together, and blended all ranks in one warm, generous flow of joy and kindness. The old halls of castles and manor houses resounded with the harp and the Christmas carol, and their ample boards groaned under the weight of hospitality. Even the poorest cottage welcomed the festive season with green decorations of bay and holly—the cheerful fire glanced its rays through the lattice, inviting the passengers to raise the latch and join the gossip knot huddled round the hearth, beguiling the long evening with legendary jokes and oft-told Christmas tales.

One of the least pleasing effects of modern refinement is the havoc it has made among the hearty old holiday customs. It has completely taken off the sharp touchings and spirited reliefs of these embellishments of life, and has worn down society into a more smooth and polished, but certainly a less characteristic surface. Many of the games and ceremonials of Christmas have entirely disappeared, and like the sherris sack of old Falstaff are become matters of speculation and dispute among commentators.¹ They flourished in times full of spirit and lustihood, when men enjoyed life roughly, but heartily and vigorously; times wild and picturesque, which have furnished poetry with its richest materials, and the drama with its most attractive variety of characters and manners. The world has become more worldly. There is more of dissipation and less of enjoyment. Pleasure has expanded into a broader, but a shallower stream, and has forsaken many of those deep and quiet channels where it flowed sweetly through the calm bosom of domestic life. Society has acquired a more enlightened and elegant tone; but it has lost many of its strong local peculiarities, its home-bred feelings, its honest fireside delights. The traditionary customs of golden-hearted antiquity, its feudal hospitalities and lordly wassailings, have passed away with the baronial castles and stately manor houses in which they were celebrated. They

¹ See the Second Part of Henry the Fourth, IV, iii, 104.

comported with the shadowy hall, the great oaken gallery, and the tapestried parlor, but are unfitted to the light showy saloons and gay drawing-rooms of the modern villa.

Shorn, however, as it is, of its ancient and festive honors, Christmas is still a period of delightful excitement in England. It is gratifying to see that home feeling completely aroused which holds so powerful a place in every English bosom. The preparations making on every side for the social board that is again to unite friends and kindred; the presents of good cheer passing and repassing,—those tokens of regard and quickeners of kind feelings; the evergreens distributed about houses and churches, emblems of peace and gladness: all these have the most pleasing effect in producing fond associations and kindling benevolent sympathies. Even the sound of the waits,¹ rude as may be their minstrelsy, breaks upon the mid-watches of a winter night with the effect of perfect harmony. As I have been awakened by them in that still and solemn hour, “when deep sleep falleth upon man,”² I have listened with a hushed delight, and connecting them with the sacred and joyous occasion, have almost fancied them into another celestial choir announcing peace and good-will to mankind.

How delightfully the imagination when wrought upon by these moral influences turns everything to melody and beauty! The very crowing of the cock, heard sometimes in the profound repose of the country, “telling³ the night watches to his feathery dames,”⁴ was thought by the common people to announce the approach of this sacred festival.

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;

¹ Waits are bands of singers who go about the roads and streets, often at night, singing carols.

² *Job*, iv, 13, and xxxiii, 15.

³ counting.

⁴ *Comus*, l. 347.

The nights are wholesome—then no planets strike,
 No fairy takes,¹ no witch hath power to charm,
 So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.²

Amidst the general call to happiness, the bustle of the spirits, and stir of the affections, which prevail at this period, what bosom can remain insensible? It is indeed the season of regenerated feeling—the season for kindling, not merely the fire of hospitality in the hall, but the genial flame of charity in the heart.

The scene of early love again rises green to memory beyond the sterile waste of years; and the idea of home, fraught with the fragrance of home-dwelling joys, reanimates the drooping spirit, as the Arabian breeze will sometimes waft the freshness of the distant fields to the weary pilgrim of the desert.

Stranger and sojourner as I am in the land,—though for me no social hearth may blaze, no hospitable roof throw open its doors, nor the warm grasp of friendship welcome me at the threshold,—yet I feel the influence of the season beaming into my soul from the happy looks of those around me. Surely happiness is reflective, like the light of heaven; and every countenance bright with smiles and glowing with innocent enjoyment is a mirror transmitting to others the rays of a supreme and ever-shining benevolence. He who can turn churlishly away from contemplating the felicity of his fellow-beings, and can sit down darkling and repining in his loneliness when all around is joyful, may have his moments of strong excitement and selfish gratification, but he wants the genial and social sympathies which constitute the charm of a merry Christmas.

¹ puts an evil charm on one.

² *Hamlet*, I, i, 158-164.

THE STAGE COACH

Omne bene
 Sine pœnâ
 Tempus est ludendi:
 Venit hora
 Absque morâ
 Libros deponendi.

OLD HOLIDAY SCHOOL SONG.¹

IN the preceding paper I have made some general observations on the Christmas festivities of England, and am tempted to illustrate them by some anecdotes of a Christmas passed in the country; in perusing which I would most courteously invite my reader to lay aside the austerity of wisdom, and to put on that genuine holiday spirit which is tolerant of folly and anxious only for amusement.

In the course of a December tour in Yorkshire, I rode for a long distance in one of the public coaches on the day preceding Christmas. The coach was crowded both inside and out with passengers who, by their talk, seemed principally bound to the mansions of relations or friends to eat the Christmas dinner. It was loaded also with hampers of game and baskets and boxes of delicacies; and hares hung dangling their long ears about the coachman's box, presents from distant friends for the impending feast. I had three fine rosy-cheeked boys for my fellow-passengers inside, full of the buxom health and manly spirit which I have observed in the children of this country. They were returning home for the holidays in high glee, and promising themselves a world of enjoyment. It was delightful to hear the gigantic plans of

¹ The following is rather a free translation:

“Tasks and troubles all are done;
 And the time for play
 Long delayed, is now begun:
 Put the books away.”

This recalls the words with which James Lovell dismissed the Boston Latin School on the morning of April 19th, 1775.

“War's begun,
 School's done;
 Deponite libros.”

the little rogues and the impracticable feats they were to perform during their six weeks' emancipation from the abhorred thraldom of book, birch, and pedagogue. They were full of anticipations of the meeting with the family and household, down to the very cat and dog; and of the joy they were to give their little sisters by the presents with which their pockets were crammed; but the meeting to which they seemed to look forward with the greatest impatience was with Bantam, which I found to be a pony, and according to their talk possessed of more virtues than any steed since the days of Bucephalus.¹ How he could trot! how he could run! and then such leaps as he would take—there was not a hedge in the whole country that he could not clear.

They were under the particular guardianship of the coachman, to whom whenever an opportunity presented they addressed a host of questions, and pronounced him one of the best fellows in the world. Indeed, I could not but notice the more than ordinary air of bustle and importance of the coachman, who wore his hat a little on one side, and had a large bunch of Christmas greens stuck in the buttonhole of his coat. He is always a personage full of mighty care and business, but he is particularly so during this season, having so many commissions to execute in consequence of the great interchange of presents. And here, perhaps, it may not be unacceptable to my untraveled readers to have a sketch that may serve as a general representation of this very numerous and important class of functionaries, who have a dress, a manner, a language, an air, peculiar to themselves, and prevalent throughout the fraternity; so that wherever an English stage coachman may be seen, he cannot be mistaken for one of any other craft or mystery.

He has commonly a broad, full face, curiously mottled with red, as if the blood had been forced by hard feeding into every

¹ The wonderful horse of Alexander the Great; no one could ride him but the conqueror of the world.

vessel of the skin; he is swelled into jolly dimensions by frequent potations of malt liquors, and his bulk is still further increased by a multiplicity of coats, in which he is buried like a cauliflower, the upper one reaching to his heels. He wears a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat; a huge roll of colored handkerchief about his neck, knowingly knotted and tucked in at the bosom; and has in summer time a large bouquet of flowers in his buttonhole—the present, most probably, of some enamored country lass. His waistcoat is commonly of some bright color, striped, and his small clothes extend far below the knees to meet a pair of jockey boots which reach about halfway up his legs.

All this costume is maintained with much precision; he has a pride in having his clothes of excellent materials; and notwithstanding the seeming grossness of his appearance, there is still discernible that neatness and propriety of person which is almost inherent in an Englishman. He enjoys great consequence and consideration along the road; has frequent conferences with the village housewives, who look upon him as a man of great trust and dependence; and he seems to have a good understanding with every bright-eyed country lass. The moment he arrives where the horses are to be changed, he throws down the reins with something of an air and abandons the cattle¹ to the care of the hostler, his duty being merely to drive from one stage to another. When off the box his hands are thrust into the pockets of his greatcoat, and he rolls about the inn yard with an air of the most absolute lordliness. Here he is generally surrounded by an admiring throng of hostlers, stableboys, shoeblacks, and those nameless hangers-on that infest inns and taverns and run errands and do all kind of odd jobs for the privilege of battenning on the drippings of the kitchen and the leakage of the taproom. These all look up to him as to an oracle, treasure up his cant phrases, echo his opinions about horses and other topics of

¹ his horses.

jockey lore, and above all endeavor to imitate his air and carriage. Every ragamuffin that has a coat to his back thrusts his hands in the pockets, rolls in his gait, talks slang, and is an embryo "coachey."

Perhaps it might be owing to the pleasing serenity that reigned in my own mind that I fancied I saw cheerfulness in every countenance throughout the journey. A stage coach, however, carries animation always with it, and puts the world in motion as it whirls along. The horn sounded at the entrance of a village produces a general bustle. Some hasten forth to meet friends; some with bundles and bandboxes to secure places, and in the hurry of the moment can hardly take leave of the group that accompanies them. In the mean time the coachman has a world of small commissions to execute. Sometimes he delivers a hare or pheasant; sometimes jerks a small parcel or newspaper to the door of a public house; and sometimes, with knowing leer and words of sly import, hands to some half-blushing, half-laughing housemaid an odd-shaped billet-doux from some rustic admirer. As the coach rattles through the village every one runs to the window, and you have glances on every side of fresh country faces and blooming, giggling girls. At the corners are assembled juntos of village idlers and wise men, who take their stations there for the important purpose of seeing company pass; but the sagest knot is generally at the blacksmith's, to whom the passing of the coach is an event fruitful of much speculation. The smith, with the horse's heel in his lap, pauses as the vehicle whirls by; the cyclops¹ round the anvil suspend their ringing hammers and suffer the iron to grow cool; and the sooty spectre, in brown paper cap laboring at the bellows, leans on the handle for a moment and permits the asthmatic engine to heave a long-drawn sigh, while he glares through the murky smoke and sulphureous gleams of the smithy.

¹ The Cyclopes were the workmen of Vulcan, the craftsman and artificer of the ancient gods.

Perhaps the impending holiday might have given a more than usual animation to the country, for it seemed to me as if everybody was in good looks and good spirits. Game, poultry, and other luxuries of the table were in brisk circulation in the villages; the grocers', butchers', and fruiterers' shops were thronged with customers. The housewives were stirring briskly about, putting their dwellings in order; and the glossy branches of holly with their bright-red berries began to appear at the windows. The scene brought to mind an old writer's account of Christmas preparations: "Now capons and hens, beside turkeys, geese, and ducks, with beef and mutton, must all die, for in twelve days¹ a multitude of people will not be fed with a little. Now plums and spice, sugar and honey, square it among pies and broth. Now or never must music be in tune, for the youth must dance and sing to get them a heat, while the aged sit by the fire. The country maid leaves half her market, and must be sent again if she forgets a pack of cards on Christmas eve. Great is the contention of holly and ivy, whether master or dame wears the breeches. Dice and cards benefit the butler; and if the cook do not lack wit, he will sweetly lick his fingers."²

I was roused from this fit of luxurious meditation by a shout from my little traveling companions. They had been looking out of the coach windows for the last few miles, recognizing every tree and cottage as they approached home, and now there was a general burst of joy—"There's John! and there's old Carlo! and there's Bantam!" cried the happy little rogues, clapping their hands.

At the end of the lane there was an old sober-looking servant in livery waiting for them; he was accompanied by a superannuated pointer and by the redoubtable Bantam, a little old rat of a pony with a shaggy mane and long rusty

¹ The twelve days which make the full Christmas festival from Christmas Eve to Epiphany or Twelfth Night.

² The old writer was Matthew Steven-

son. The passage is from his "Twelve Months," 1661, said to be a curious and interesting book.

tail, who stood dozing quietly by the roadside, little dreaming of the bustling times that awaited him.

I was pleased to see the fondness with which the little fellows leaped about the steady old footman and hugged the pointer, who wriggled his whole body for joy. But Bantam was the great object of interest; all wanted to mount at once, and it was with some difficulty that John arranged that they should ride by turns, and the eldest should ride first.

Off they set at last; one on the pony, with the dog bounding and barking before him, and the others holding John's hands; both talking at once, and overpowering him with questions about home and with school anecdotes. I looked after them with a feeling in which I do not know whether pleasure or melancholy predominated; for I was reminded of those days when, like them, I had neither known care nor sorrow, and a holiday was the summit of earthly felicity. We stopped a few moments afterwards to water the horses, and on resuming our route, a turn of the road brought us in sight of a neat country seat. I could just distinguish the forms of a lady and two young girls in the portico, and I saw my little comrades, with Bantam, Carlo, and old John, trooping along the carriage road. I leaned out of the coach window in hopes of witnessing the happy meeting, but a grove of trees shut it from my sight.

In the evening we reached a village where I had determined to pass the night. As we drove into the great gateway of the inn, I saw on one side the light of a rousing kitchen fire beaming through a window. I entered, and admired for the hundredth time that picture of convenience, neatness, and broad honest enjoyment, the kitchen of an English inn. It was of spacious dimensions, hung round with copper and tin vessels highly polished, and decorated here and there with a Christmas green. Hams, tongues, and flitches of bacon were suspended from the ceiling; a smoke-jack made its ceaseless clanking beside the fireplace, and a

clock ticked in one corner. A well-scoured deal table extended along one side of the kitchen, with a cold round of beef and other hearty viands upon it, over which two foaming tankards of ale seemed mounting guard. Travelers of inferior order were preparing to attack this stout repast, while others sat smoking and gossiping over their ale on two high-backed oaken settles beside the fire. Trim housemaids were hurrying backwards and forwards under the directions of a fresh, bustling landlady, but still seizing an occasional moment to exchange a flippant word and have a rallying laugh with the group round the fire. The scene completely realized Poor Robin's humble idea of the comforts of midwinter:

Now trees their leafy hats do bare
To reverence Winter's silver hair;
A handsome hostess, merry host,
A pot of ale now and a toast,
Tobacco and a good coal fire,
Are things this season doth require.¹

I had not been long at the inn when a post-chaise drove up to the door. A young gentleman stepped out, and by the light of the lamps I caught a glimpse of a countenance which I thought I knew. I moved forward to get a nearer view, when his eye caught mine. I was not mistaken; it was Frank Bracebridge, a sprightly, good-humored young fellow with whom I had once traveled on the continent. Our meeting was extremely cordial, for the countenance of an old fellow-traveler always brings up the recollection of a thousand pleasant scenes, odd adventures, and excellent jokes. To discuss all these in a transient interview at an inn was impossible; and finding that I was not pressed for time, and was merely making a tour of observation, he insisted that I should give him a day or two at his father's country seat, to which he was going to pass the holidays, and which lay at a few

¹ *Poor Robin's Almanac*, 1684.

miles' distance. "It is better than eating a solitary Christmas dinner at an inn," said he, "and I can assure you of a hearty welcome in something of the old-fashioned style." His reasoning was cogent, and I must confess the preparation I had seen for universal festivity and social enjoyment had made me feel a little impatient of my loneliness. I closed therefore at once with his invitation; the chaise drove up to the door, and in a few moments I was on my way to the family mansion of the Bracebridges.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Saint Francis and Saint Benedight
 Bless¹ this house from wicked wight;
 From the night-mare and the goblin,
 That is hight good fellow Robin;
 Keep it from all evil spirits,
 Fairies, weezels, rats, and ferrets:
 From curfew time
 To the next prime.²

CARTWRIGHT.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, but extremely cold; our chaise whirled rapidly over the frozen ground; the postboy smacked his whip incessantly, and a part of the time his horses were on a gallop. "He knows where he is going," said my companion, laughing, "and is eager to arrive in time for some of the merriment and good cheer of the servants' hall. My father, you must know, is a bigoted devotee of the old school, and prides himself upon keeping up something of old English hospitality. He is a tolerable specimen of what you will rarely meet with nowadays in its purity, the old English

¹ Preserve. So "Bless you from whirlwind," *King Lear*, III, iv, 57—Even the Latin word *Benedicite* was used with the

same meaning, as in Herrick's "Lines to the Bellman."

² The first hour of the day.

country gentleman;¹ for our men of fortune spend so much of their time in town, and fashion is carried so much into the country, that the strong, rich peculiarities of ancient rural life are almost polished away. My father, however, from early years, took honest Peacham² for his text-book instead of Chesterfield; he determined in his own mind that there was no condition more truly honorable and enviable than that of a country gentleman on his paternal lands, and therefore passes the whole of his time on his estate. He is a strenuous advocate for the revival of the old rural games and holiday observances, and is deeply read in the writers, ancient and modern, who have treated on the subject. Indeed his favorite range of reading is among the authors who flourished at least two centuries since,³ who, he insists, wrote and thought more like true Englishmen than any of their successors. He even regrets sometimes that he had not been born a few centuries earlier, when England was itself and had its peculiar manners and customs. As he lives at some distance from the main road, in rather a lonely part of the country, without any rival gentry near him, he has that most enviable of all blessings to an Englishman, an opportunity of indulging the bent of his own humor without molestation. Being representative of the oldest family in the neighborhood, and a great part of the peasantry being his tenants, he is much looked up

¹ The old English country gentleman has for generations been the type of hospitality and healthy life. This picture is perhaps suggested, and at least may be compared, with the figure of Sir Roger de Coverley in the *Spectator*. But the type is older even than that. The lines quoted on p. 26 are from a poem which compares the old-fashioned country gentleman with the new-fangled courtier.

² Henry Peacham published *The Complete Gentleman* in 1622, in which, among other things, he held up to praise the country life. "I detest," he writes, "that effeminacy of the most that burn out day and night in their beds and by the fireside,

in trifles, gaming, or courting all the winter in the city; appearing but as cuckoos in the spring, one time in the year to the country and their tenants, leaving the care of keeping good houses at Christmas to the honest yeomen of the country." Lord Chesterfield, on the other hand, was a fine gentleman of the 18th century, the ideal example of polished refinement of social manners.

³ It has already been noticed that almost all the quotations in the *Sketch Book* are from writers of the first half of the 17th century. A good many of these had been forgotten and were, in Irving's time, being revived, as we may say.

to, and in general is known simply by the appellation of 'The Squire,' a title which has been accorded to the head of the family since time immemorial. I think it best to give you these hints about my worthy old father, to prepare you for any eccentricities that might otherwise appear absurd."

We had passed for some time along the wall of a park, and at length the chaise stopped at the gate. It was in a heavy magnificent old style, of iron bars, fancifully wrought at top into flourishes and flowers. The huge square columns that supported the gate were surmounted by the family crest. Close adjoining was the porter's lodge, sheltered under dark fir trees, and almost buried in shrubbery.

The postboy rang a large porter's bell, which resounded through the still frosty air, and was answered by the distant barking of dogs with which the mansion house seemed garrisoned. An old woman immediately appeared at the gate. As the moonlight fell strongly upon her, I had a full view of a little primitive dame dressed very much in the antique taste, with a neat kerchief and stomacher, and her silver hair peeping from under a cap of snowy whiteness. She came courtesying forth with many expressions of simple joy at seeing her young master. Her husband, it seemed, was up at the house keeping Christmas eve in the servants' hall; they could not do without him, as he was the best hand at a song and story in the household.

My friend proposed that we should alight and walk through the park to the hall, which was at no great distance, while the chaise should follow on. Our road wound through a noble avenue of trees, among the naked branches of which the moon glittered as she rolled through the deep vault of a cloudless sky. The lawn beyond was sheeted with a slight covering of snow, which here and there sparkled as the moonbeams caught a frosty crystal; and at a distance might be seen a thin transparent vapor stealing up from the low grounds and threatening gradually to shroud the landscape.

My companion looked around him with transport: "How often," said he, "have I scampered up this avenue on returning home on school vacations! How often have I played under these trees when a boy! I feel a degree of filial reverence for them, as we look up to those who have cherished us in childhood. My father was always scrupulous in exacting our holidays and having us around him on family festivals. He used to direct and superintend our games with the strictness that some parents do the studies of their children. He was very particular that we should play the old English games according to their original form; and consulted old books for precedent and authority for every 'merrie disport';¹ yet I assure you there never was pedantry so delightful. It was the policy of the good old gentleman to make his children feel that home was the happiest place in the world; and I value this delicious home feeling as one of the choicest gifts a parent could bestow."

We were interrupted by the clamor of a troop of dogs of all sorts and sizes, "mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound, and curs of low degree,"² that, disturbed by the ring of the porter's bell and the rattling of the chaise came bounding open-mouthed across the lawn.

"— The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!"³

cried Bracebridge, laughing. At the sound of his voice the bark was changed into a yelp of delight, and in a moment he was surrounded and almost overpowered by the caresses of the faithful animals.

We had now come in full view of the old family mansion, partly thrown in deep shadow, and partly lit up by the cold moonshine. It was an irregular building of some magnitude, and seemed to be of the architecture of different periods. One

¹ Quoted, perhaps, from Stowe, as cited p. 77, note.

² From the "Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog," by Goldsmith.

³ *King Lear*, III, vi, 66.

wing was evidently very ancient, with heavy stone-shafted bow windows jutting out and overrun with ivy, from among the foliage of which the small diamond-shaped panes of glass glittered with the moonbeams. The rest of the house was in the French taste of Charles the Second's time, having been repaired and altered, as my friend told me, by one of his ancestors who returned with that monarch at the Restoration.¹ The grounds about the house were laid out in the old formal manner of artificial flower-beds, clipped shrubberies, raised terraces, and heavy stone balustrades, ornamented with urns, a leaden statue or two, and a jet of water. The old gentleman, I was told, was extremely careful to preserve this obsolete finery in all its original state. He admired this fashion in gardening; it had an air of magnificence, was courtly and noble, and befitting good old family style. The boasted imitation of nature in modern gardening had sprung up with modern republican notions, but did not suit a monarchical government; it smacked of the levelling system. I could not help smiling at this introduction of politics into gardening, though I expressed some apprehension that I should find the old gentleman rather intolerant in his creed. Frank assured me, however, that it was almost the only instance in which he had ever heard his father meddle with politics; and he believed that he had got this notion from a member of Parliament who once passed a few weeks with him. The squire was glad of any argument to defend his clipped yew trees and formal terraces, which had been occasionally attacked by modern landscape gardeners.

As we approached the house we heard the sound of music, and now and then a burst of laughter from one end of the building. This, Bracebridge said, must proceed from the servants' hall, where a great deal of revelry was permitted and even encouraged by the squire throughout the twelve days of Christmas, provided everything was done conformably to

¹ The return of Charles the Second from France in 1660 after the Protectorate.

ancient usage. Here were kept up the old games of hoodman blind, shoe the wild mare, hot cockles, steal the white loaf, bob apple, and snap dragon; the Yule clog¹ and Christmas candle were regularly burnt, and the mistletoe with its white berries hung up, to the imminent peril of all the pretty housemaids.²

So intent were the servants upon their sports that we had to ring repeatedly before we could make ourselves heard. On our arrival being announced, the squire came out to receive us, accompanied by his two other sons—one a young officer in the army, home on leave of absence; the other an Oxonian,³ just from the university. The squire was a fine, healthy-looking old gentleman, with silver hair curling lightly round an open florid countenance, in which the physiognomist, with the advantage like myself of a previous hint or two, might discover a singular mixture of whim and benevolence.

The family meeting was warm and affectionate. As the evening was far advanced, the squire would not permit us to change our traveling dresses, but ushered us at once to the company, which was assembled in a large old-fashioned hall. It was composed of different branches of a numerous family connection, where there were the usual proportion of old uncles and aunts, comfortable married dames, superannuated spinsters, blooming country cousins, half-fledged striplings, and bright-eyed boarding-school hoydens. They were variously occupied: some at a round game of cards, others conversing around the fireplace; at one end of the hall was a group of the young folks, some nearly grown up, others of a more tender and budding age, fully engrossed by a merry game; and a profusion of wooden horses, penny trumpets, and tattered dolls about the floor showed traces of a troop of little

¹ or log; see Irving's Note, p.46.

² The mistletoe is still hung up in farm-houses and kitchens at Christmas; and the young men have the privilege of kissing the girls under it, plucking each time

a berry from the bush. When the berries are all plucked, the privilege ceases.—
IRVING'S NOTE.

³ A student at the University of Oxford.

fairy beings, who, having frolicked through a happy day, had been carried off to slumber through a peaceful night.

While the mutual greetings were going on between young Bracebridge and his relatives, I had time to scan the apartment. I have called it a hall, for so it had certainly been in old times, and the squire had evidently endeavored to restore it to something of its primitive state. Over the heavy projecting fireplace was suspended a picture of a warrior in armor, standing by a white horse, and on the opposite wall hung a helmet, buckler, and lance. At one end an enormous pair of antlers were inserted in the wall, the branches serving as hooks on which to suspend hats, whips, and spurs; and in the corners of the apartment were fowling-pieces, fishing-rods, and other sporting implements. The furniture was of the cumbrous workmanship of former days, though some articles of modern convenience had been added, and the oaken floor had been carpeted; so that the whole presented an odd mixture of parlor and hall.

The grate had been removed from the wide overwhelming fireplace, to make way for a fire of wood, in the midst of which was an enormous log glowing and blazing, and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat: this I understood was the Yule clog, which the squire was particular in having brought in and illumined on a Christmas eve according to ancient custom.¹

¹ The *Yule clog* is a great log of wood, sometimes the root of a tree, brought into the house with great ceremony on Christmas eve, laid in the fireplace, and lighted with the brand of last year's clog. While it lasted, there was great drinking, singing, and telling of tales. Sometimes it was accompanied by Christmas candles; but in the cottages the only light was from the ruddy blaze of the great wood fire. The Yule clog was to burn all night; if it went out, it was considered a sign of ill luck.

Herrick mentions it in one of his songs:—

Come, bring with a noise,
My merrie, merrie boyes,
The Christmas log to the firing;
While my good dame, she
Bids ye all be free,
And drink to your hearts desiring.

The Yule clog is still burnt in many farmhouses and kitchens in England, particularly in the north, and there are several superstitions connected with it among the peasantry. If a squinting person come to the house while it is burning, or a person barefooted, it is considered an ill omen. The brand remaining from the Yule clog is carefully put away to light the next year's Christmas fire.—IRVING'S NOTE.

It was really delightful to see the old squire seated in his hereditary elbow chair by the hospitable fireside of his ancestors, and looking around him like the sun of a system, beaming warmth and gladness to every heart. Even the very dog that lay stretched at his feet, as he lazily shifted his position and yawned, would look fondly up in his master's face, wag his tail against the floor, and stretch himself again to sleep, confident of kindness and protection. There is an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality which cannot be described, but is immediately felt, and puts the stranger at once at his ease. I had not been seated many minutes by the comfortable hearth of the worthy old cavalier before I found myself as much at home as if I had been one of the family.

Supper was announced shortly after our arrival. It was served up in a spacious oaken chamber, the panels of which shone with wax, and around which were several family portraits decorated with holly and ivy. Besides the accustomed lights, two great wax tapers called Christmas candles, wreathed with greens, were placed on a highly polished beaufet¹ among the family plate. The table was abundantly spread with substantial fare; but the squire made his supper of frumenty, a dish made of wheat cakes boiled in milk, with rich spices, being a standing dish in old times for Christmas eve.

I was happy to find my old friend, minced pie, in the retinue of the feast; and finding him to be perfectly orthodox,² and that I need not be ashamed of my predilection, I greeted him with all the warmth wherewith we usually greet an old and very genteel acquaintance.

The mirth of the company was greatly promoted by the humors of an eccentric personage whom Mr. Bracebridge al-

¹ now more commonly buffet.

² Cf. p. 62. The Puritans frowned on mince pie, on church festivals, as well as

on other and more significant ceremonies.

Irving is always fond of a jest at the old New Englanders, as in *Ichabod Crane*.

ways addressed with the quaint appellation of Master Simon. He was a tight, brisk little man, with the air of an arrant old bachelor. His nose was shaped like the bill of a parrot; his face slightly pitted with the small-pox, with a dry perpetual bloom on it like a frost-bitten leaf in autumn. He had an eye of great quickness and vivacity, with a drollery and lurking waggery of expression that was irresistible. He was evidently the wit of the family, dealing very much in sly jokes and innuendoes with the ladies, and making infinite merriment by harping upon old themes, which, unfortunately, my ignorance of the family chronicles did not permit me to enjoy. It seemed to be his great delight during supper to keep a young girl next him in a continual agony of stifled laughter, in spite of her awe of the reproving looks of her mother, who sat opposite. Indeed, he was the idol of the younger part of the company, who laughed at everything he said or did, and at every turn of his countenance; I could not wonder at it, for he must have been a miracle of accomplishments in their eyes. He could imitate Punch and Judy; make an old woman of his hand, with the assistance of a burnt cork and pocket handkerchief; and cut an orange into such a ludicrous caricature that the young folks were ready to die with laughing.

I was let briefly into his history by Frank Bracebridge. He was an old bachelor, of a small independent income, which by careful management was sufficient for all his wants. He revolved through the family system like a vagrant comet in its orbit; sometimes visiting one branch, and sometimes another quite remote; as is often the case with gentlemen of extensive connections and small fortunes in England. He had a chirping buoyant disposition, always enjoying the present moment; and his frequent change of scene and company prevented his acquiring those rusty unaccommodating habits with which old bachelors are so uncharitably charged. He was a complete family chronicle, being versed in the

genealogy, history, and intermarriages of the whole house of Bracebridge, which made him a great favorite with the old folks; he was a beau of all the elder ladies and superannuated spinsters, among whom he was habitually considered rather a young fellow; and he was master of the revels among the children: so that there was not a more popular being in the sphere in which he moved than Mr. Simon Bracebridge. Of late years he had resided almost entirely with the squire, to whom he had become a factotum,¹ and whom he particularly delighted by jumping with his humor in respect to old times, and by having a scrap of an old song to suit every occasion. We had presently a specimen of his last-mentioned talent, for no sooner was supper removed and spiced wines and other beverages peculiar to the season introduced than Master Simon was called on for a good old Christmas song. He bethought himself for a moment, and then, with a sparkle of the eye and a voice that was by no means bad, excepting that it ran occasionally into a falsetto like the notes of a split reed, he quavered forth a quaint old ditty:

Now Christmas is come,
 Let us beat up the drum,
 And call all our neighbors together,
 And when they appear,
 Let us make them such cheer,
 As will keep out the wind and the weather, etc.

The supper had disposed every one to gayety, and an old harper was summoned from the servants' hall, where he had been strumming all the evening, and to all appearance comforting himself with some of the squire's home-brewed. He was a kind of hanger-on, I was told, of the establishment, and, though ostensibly a resident of the village, was oftener to be found in the squire's kitchen than his own home, the old gentleman being fond of the sound of "harp in hall."

¹ one who manages everything.

The dance, like most dances after supper, was a merry one; some of the older folks joined in it, and the squire himself figured down several couple with a partner with whom he affirmed he had danced at every Christmas for nearly half a century. Master Simon, who seemed to be a kind of connecting link between the old times and the new, and to be withal a little antiquated in the taste of his accomplishments, evidently piqued himself on his dancing, and was endeavoring to gain credit by the heel and toe, rigadon, and other graces of the ancient school; but he had unluckily assorted himself with a little romping girl from boarding-school, who by her wild vivacity kept him continually on the stretch, and defeated all his sober attempts at elegance,—such are the ill-assorted matches to which antique gentlemen are unfortunately prone!

The young Oxonian, on the contrary, had led out one of his maiden aunts, on whom the rogue played a thousand little knaveries with impunity; he was full of practical jokes, and his delight was to tease his aunts and cousins; yet, like all madcap youngsters, he was a universal favorite among the women. The most interesting couple in the dance was the young officer and a ward of the squire's, a beautiful blushing girl of seventeen. From several shy glances which I had noticed in the course of the evening, I suspected there was a little kindness growing up between them; and indeed the young soldier was just the hero to captivate a romantic girl. He was tall, slender, and handsome, and, like most young British officers of late years, had picked up various small accomplishments on the continent¹—he could talk French and Italian—draw landscapes, sing very tolerably—dance divinely; but above all he had been wounded at Waterloo. What girl of seventeen, well read in poetry and romance, could resist such a mirror of chivalry and perfection!

The moment the dance was over, he caught up a guitar,

¹ In the years before Waterloo the English armies had been much on the continent.

and lolling against the old marble fireplace, in an attitude which I am half inclined to suspect was studied, began the little French air of the Troubadour. The squire, however, exclaimed against having anything on Christmas eve but good old English; upon which the young minstrel, casting up his eye for a moment as if in an effort of memory, struck into another strain, and with a charming air of gallantry gave Herrick's *Night-Piece to Julia*:¹

Her eyes the glow-worm lend thee;
 The shooting stars attend thee,
 And the elves also,
 Whose little eyes glow
 Like the sparks of fire, befriend thee.

No Will o' the Wisp mislight thee;
 Nor snake nor slow-worm bite thee;
 But on, on thy way,
 Not making a stay,
 Since ghost there is none to affright thee.

Then let not the dark thee cumber;
 What though the moon does slumber,
 The stars of the night
 Will lend thee their light,
 Like tapers clear without number.

Then, Julia, let me woo thee,
 Thus, thus to come unto me,
 And when I shall meet
 Thy silvery feet,
 My soul I'll pour into thee.

The song might or might not have been intended in compliment to the fair Julia, for so I found his partner was called; she, however, was certainly unconscious of any such application, for she never looked at the singer, but kept her eyes cast upon the floor. Her face was suffused, it is true,

¹ This was "good old English," Herrick being a poet of the 17th century.

with a beautiful blush, and there was a gentle heaving of the bosom, but all that was doubtless caused by the exercise of the dance; indeed, so great was her indifference, that she amused herself with plucking to pieces a choice bouquet of hothouse flowers, and by the time the song was concluded the nosegay lay in ruins on the floor.

The party now broke up for the night with the kind-hearted old custom of shaking hands. As I passed through the hall on my way to my chamber, the dying embers of the Yule clog still sent forth a dusky glow, and had it not been the season when "no spirit dares stir abroad," I should have been half tempted to steal from my room at midnight, and peep whether the fairies might not be at their revels about the hearth.

My chamber was in the old part of the mansion, the ponderous furniture of which might have been fabricated in the days of the giants. The room was panelled with cornices of heavy carved work, in which flowers and grotesque faces were strangely intermingled; and a row of black-looking portraits stared mournfully at me from the walls. The bed was of rich though faded damask, with a lofty tester,¹ and stood in a niche opposite a bow window. I had scarcely got into bed when a strain of music seemed to break forth in the air just below the window. I listened, and found it proceeded from a band which I concluded to be the waits from some neighboring village. They went round the house, playing under the windows. I drew aside the curtains to hear them more distinctly. The moonbeams fell through the upper part of the casement, partially lighting up the antiquated apartment. The sounds as they receded became more soft and aërial, and seemed to accord with the quiet and moonlight. I listened and listened; they became more and more tender and remote, and as they gradually died away my head sunk upon the pillow and I fell asleep.

¹ the canopy over the bed.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
 And give the honor to this day
 That sees December turn'd to May.

* * * * *

Why does the chilling winter's morne
 Smile like a field beset with corn?
 Or smell like to a meade new-shorne,
 Thus on the sudden?—Come and see
 The cause why things thus fragrant be.¹

HERRICK.

WHEN I woke the next morning, it seemed as if all the events of the preceding evening had been a dream, and nothing but the identity of the ancient chamber convinced me of their reality. While I lay musing on my pillow, I heard the sound of little feet pattering outside of the door and a whispering consultation. Presently a choir of small voices chanted forth an old Christmas carol, the burden of which was:

Rejoice, our Saviour he was born
 On Christmas day in the morning.

I rose softly, slipped on my clothes, opened the door suddenly, and beheld one of the most beautiful little fairy groups that a painter could imagine. It consisted of a boy and two girls, the eldest not more than six, and lovely as seraphs. They were going the rounds of the house, and singing at every chamber door; but my sudden appearance frightened them into mute bashfulness. They remained for a moment playing on their lips with their fingers, and now and then stealing a shy glance from under their eyebrows, until as if by one im-

¹ These lines are from Herrick's "Christmas Carol." They were written for music

composed by Mr. Henry Lawes, who composed the music for Milton's *Comus*.

pulse they scampered away, and as they turned an angle of the gallery I heard them laughing in triumph at their escape.

Everything conspired to produce kind and happy feelings in this stronghold of old-fashioned hospitality. The window of my chamber looked out upon what in summer would have been a beautiful landscape.¹ There was a sloping lawn, a fine stream winding at the foot of it, and a tract of park beyond with noble clumps of trees and herds of deer. At a distance was a neat hamlet with the smoke from the cottage chimneys hanging over it, and a church with its dark spire in strong relief against the clear, cold sky. The house was surrounded with evergreens, according to the English custom, which would have given almost an appearance of summer, but the morning was extremely frosty; the light vapor of the preceding evening had been precipitated by the cold, and covered all the trees and every blade of grass with its fine crystallizations. The rays of a bright morning sun had a dazzling effect among the glittering foliage. A robin perched upon the top of a mountain ash that hung its clusters of red berries just before my window was basking himself in the sunshine, and piping a few querulous notes; and a peacock was displaying all the glories of his train, and strutting with the pride and gravity of a Spanish grandee on the terrace walk below.

I had scarcely dressed myself when a servant appeared to invite me to family prayers. He showed me the way to a small chapel in the old wing of the house, where I found the principal part of the family already assembled in a kind of gallery furnished with cushions, hassocks, and large prayer-books; the servants were seated on benches below. The old gentleman read prayers from a desk in front of the gallery, and Master Simon acted as clerk and made the responses; and I must do him the justice to say that he acquitted himself with great gravity and decorum.

¹ Doubtless it had its peculiar beauty in winter, too, although Irving did not see it.

The service was followed by a Christmas carol which Mr. Bracebridge himself had constructed from a poem¹ of his favorite author, Herrick; and it had been adapted to an old church melody by Master Simon. As there were several good voices among the household, the effect was extremely pleasing; but I was particularly gratified by the exaltation of heart and sudden sally of grateful feeling with which the worthy squire delivered one stanza, his eye glistening, and his voice rambling out of all the bounds of time and tune:

'Tis Thou that crown'st my glittering hearth
 With guiltlesse mirth,
 And giv'st me Wassaille bowles to drink
 Spiced to the brink:
 Lord, 'tis Thy plenty-dropping hand
 That soiles my land:
 And giv'st me for my bushell sowne,
 Twice ten for one.

I afterwards understood that early morning service was read on every Sunday and saints' day throughout the year either by Mr. Bracebridge or by some member of the family. It was once almost universally the case at the seats of the nobility and gentry of England, and it is much to be regretted that the custom is falling into neglect; for the dullest observer must be sensible of the order and serenity prevalent in those households where the occasional exercise of a beautiful form of worship in the morning gives, as it were, the keynote to every temper for the day, and attunes every spirit to harmony.

Our breakfast consisted of what the squire denominated true old English fare. He indulged in some bitter lamentations over modern breakfasts of tea and toast, which he censured as among the causes of modern effeminacy and weak

¹ The poem will be found in Herrick's *Noble Numbers*, where it is called "A Thanksgiving to God for my House."

nerves, and the decline of old English heartiness; and though he admitted them to his table to suit the palates of his guests, yet there was a brave display of cold meats, wine, and ale, on the sideboard.

After breakfast I walked about the grounds with Frank Bracebridge and Master Simon, or Mr. Simon, as he was called by everybody but the squire. We were escorted by a number of gentlemanlike dogs that seemed loungers about the establishment, from the frisking spaniel to the steady old stag-hound; the last of which was of a race that had been in the family time out of mind. They were all obedient to a dog-whistle which hung to Master Simon's buttonhole, and in the midst of their gambols would glance an eye occasionally upon a small switch he carried in his hand.

The old mansion had a still more venerable look in the yellow sunshine than by pale moonlight; and I could not but feel the force of the squire's idea, that the formal terraces, heavily moulded balustrades, and clipped yew trees carried with them an air of proud aristocracy. There appeared to be an unusual number of peacocks about the place, and I was making some remarks upon what I termed a flock of them that were basking under a sunny wall, when I was gently corrected in my phraseology by Master Simon, who told me that according to the most ancient and approved treatise on hunting, I must say a *muster* of peacocks. "In the same way," added he with a slight air of pedantry, "we say a flight of doves or swallows, a bevy of quails, a herd of deer, of wrens, or cranes, a skulk of foxes, or a building of rooks." He went on to inform me that according to Sir Anthony Fitzherbert¹ we ought to ascribe to this bird "both understanding and glory; for being praised he will presently set up his tail, chiefly against the sun, to the intent you may the better behold the beauty thereof. But at the fall of the leaf when

¹ See page 57, where Master Simon's "small erudition" is explained.

his tail falleth, he will mourn and hide himself in corners till his tail come again as it was.”

I could not help smiling at this display of small erudition on so whimsical a subject; but I found that the peacocks were birds of some consequence at the hall, for Frank Bracebridge informed me that they were great favorites with his father, who was extremely careful to keep up the breed; partly because they belonged to chivalry, and were in great request at the stately banquets of the olden time; and partly because they had a pomp and magnificence about them highly becoming an old family mansion. Nothing, he was accustomed to say, had an air of greater state and dignity than a peacock perched upon an antique stone balustrade.

Master Simon had now to hurry off, having an appointment at the parish church with the village choristers, who were to perform some music of his selection. There was something extremely agreeable in the cheerful flow of animal spirits of the little man; and I confess I had been somewhat surprised at his apt quotations from authors who certainly were not in the range of everyday reading. I mentioned this last circumstance to Frank Bracebridge, who told me with a smile that Master Simon's whole stock of erudition was confined to some half a dozen old authors which the squire had put into his hands, and which he read over and over whenever he had a studious fit, as he sometimes had on a rainy day or a long winter evening. Sir Anthony Fitzherbert's *Book of Husbandry*, Markham's *Country Contentments*, the *Tretyse of Hunting*, by Sir Thomas Cockayne, Knight, Izaak Walton's *Angler*,¹ and two or three more such ancient worthies of the pen, were his standard authorities; and like all men who know but a few books, he looked up to them with a kind of idolatry, and quoted them on all occasions. As to his songs, they were chiefly picked out of old books in the

¹ These are all from the literature of the 16th and 17th centuries; the last only has survived in general knowledge.

squire's library, and adapted to tunes that were popular among the choice spirits of the last century. His practical application of scraps of literature, however, had caused him to be looked upon as a prodigy of book knowledge by all the grooms, huntsmen, and small sportsmen of the neighborhood.

While we were talking we heard the distant tolling of the village bell, and I was told that the squire was a little particular in having his household at church on a Christmas morning, considering it a day of pouring out of thanks and rejoicing; for, as old Tusser¹ observed:

At Christmas be merry, *and thankful withal,*
And feast thy poor neighbors, the great with the small.

“If you are disposed to go to church,” said Frank Bracebridge, “I can promise you a specimen of my cousin Simon's musical achievements. As the church is destitute of an organ, he has formed a band from the village amateurs and established a musical club for their improvement. He has also sorted a choir, as he sorted my father's pack of hounds, according to the directions of Gervase Markham, in his *Country Contentments*. For the bass he has sought out all the ‘deep, solemn mouths,’ and for the tenor the ‘loud-ringing mouths,’ among the country bumpkins; and for ‘sweet mouths,’ he has called with curious taste among the prettiest lasses in the neighborhood; though these last, he affirms, are the most difficult to keep in tune; your pretty female singer being exceedingly wayward and capricious, and very liable to accident.”

As the morning, though frosty, was remarkably fine and clear, the most of the family walked to the church, which was a very old building of gray stone, and stood near a village, about half a mile from the park gate. Adjoining it was a low snug parsonage, which seemed coeval with the church. The

¹ Thomas Tusser was the author of *A Hundred Good Points of Good Husbandry*, and other like works.

front of it was perfectly matted with a yew tree that had been trained against its walls, through the dense foliage of which apertures had been formed to admit light into the small antique lattices. As we passed this sheltered nest, the parson issued forth and preceded us.

I had expected to see a sleek, well-conditioned pastor, such as is often found in a snug living in the vicinity of a rich patron's table, but I was disappointed. The parson was a little, meagre, black-looking man, with a grizzled wig that was too wide and stood off from each ear; so that his head seemed to have shrunk away within it, like a dried filbert in its shell. He wore a rusty coat, with great skirts, and pockets that would have held the church Bible and prayer-book; and his small legs seemed still smaller from being planted in large shoes, decorated with enormous buckles.

I was informed by Frank Bracebridge that the parson had been a chum of his father's at Oxford, and had received this living shortly after the latter had come to his estate.¹ He was a complete black-letter hunter, and would scarcely read a work printed in the Roman character. The editions of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde were his delight; and he was indefatigable in his researches after such old English writers as have fallen into oblivion from their worthlessness. In deference perhaps to the notions of Mr. Bracebridge, he had made diligent investigations into the festive rites and holiday customs of former times; and had been as zealous in the inquiry as if he had been a boon companion; but it was merely with that plodding spirit with which men of adust temperament follow up any track of study, merely because it is denominated learning; indifferent to its intrinsic nature, whether it be the illustration of the wisdom, or of the ribaldry and obscenity of antiquity. He had pored over these old volumes so intensely that they seemed to have been reflected

¹ It was often the case in England that a great land owner had the right to name the clergyman of the parish church.

in his countenance; which, if the face be indeed an index of the mind, might be compared to a title-page of black-letter.

On reaching the church porch we found the parson rebuking the gray-headed sexton for having used mistletoe among the greens with which the church was decorated. It was, he observed, an unholy plant, profaned by having been used by the Druids in their mystic ceremonies;¹ and though it might be innocently employed in the festive ornamenting of halls and kitchens, yet it had been deemed by the Fathers of the Church as unhallowed, and totally unfit for sacred purposes. So tenacious was he on this point that the poor sexton was obliged to strip down a great part of the humble trophies of his taste before the parson would consent to enter upon the service of the day.

The interior of the church was venerable but simple; on the walls were several mural monuments of the Bracebridges, and just beside the altar was a tomb of ancient workmanship on which lay the effigy of a warrior in armor, with his legs crossed, a sign of his having been a crusader. I was told it was one of the family who had signalized himself in the Holy Land, and the same whose picture hung over the fireplace in the hall.

During service Master Simon stood up in the pew and repeated the responses very audibly, evincing that kind of ceremonious devotion punctually observed by a gentleman of the old school and a man of old family connections. I observed too that he turned over the leaves of a folio prayer-book with something of a flourish; possibly to show off an enormous seal ring which enriched one of his fingers, and which had the look of a family relic. But he was evidently most solicitous about the musical part of the service, keeping his eye fixed intently on the choir, and beating time with much gesticulation and emphasis.

The orchestra was in a small gallery, and presented a most

¹ Here the parson is quite correct according to all authorities.

whimsical grouping of heads piled one above the other, among which I particularly noticed that of the village tailor, a pale fellow with a retreating forehead and chin, who played on the clarionet, and seemed to have blown his face to a point; and there was another, a short pousy man, stooping and laboring at a bass-viol, so as to show nothing but the top of a round bald head, like the egg of an ostrich. There were two or three pretty faces among the female singers, to which the keen air of a frosty morning had given a bright rosy tint; but the gentlemen choristers had evidently been chosen, like old Cremona fiddles, more for tone than looks; and as several had to sing from the same book, there were clusterings of odd physiognomies, not unlike those groups of cherubs we sometimes see on country tombstones.¹

The usual services of the choir were managed tolerably well, the vocal parts generally lagging a little behind the instrumental, and some loitering fiddler now and then making up for lost time by traveling over a passage with prodigious celerity, and clearing more bars than the keenest fox-hunter to be in at the death. But the great trial was an anthem that had been prepared and arranged by Master Simon, and on which he had founded great expectation. Unluckily there was a blunder at the very outset; the musicians became flurried; Master Simon was in a fever; everything went on lamely and irregularly until they came to a chorus beginning, "Now let us sing with one accord," which seemed to be a signal for parting company. All became discord and confusion; each shifted for himself, and got to the end as well, or, rather, as soon as he could, excepting one old chorister in a pair of horn spectacles bestriding and pinching a long sonorous nose, who happened to stand a little apart, and being wrapped up in his own melody kept on a quavering course, wriggling his head,

¹ For a picture of a country choir in modern England, the reader should look

at Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

ogling his book, and winding all up by a nasal solo of at least three bars' duration.

The parson gave us a most erudite sermon on the rites and ceremonies of Christmas, and the propriety of observing it not merely as a day of thanksgiving, but of rejoicing; supporting the correctness of his opinions by the earliest usages of the church, and enforcing them by the authorities of Theophilus of Cesarea, St. Cyprian, St. Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and a cloud more of saints and fathers from whom he made copious quotations. I was a little at a loss to perceive the necessity of such a mighty array of forces to maintain a point which no one present seemed inclined to dispute; but I soon found that the good man had a legion of ideal adversaries to contend with; having in the course of his researches on the subject of Christmas got completely embroiled in the sectarian controversies of the Revolution, when the Puritans made such a fierce assault upon the ceremonies of the church, and poor old Christmas was driven out of the land by proclamation of Parliament.¹ The worthy parson lived but with times past, and knew but little of the present.

Shut up among worm-eaten tomes in the retirement of his antiquated little study, the pages of old times were to him as the gazettes of the day; while the era of the Revolution was mere modern history. He forgot that nearly two centuries had elapsed since the fiery persecution of poor mincepie² throughout the land; when plum porridge was denounced as "mere popery," and roast-beef as anti-christian;

¹ From the *Flying Eagle*, a small gazette, published December 24, 1652: "The House spent much time this day about the business of the Navy, for settling the affairs at sea, and before they rose, were presented with a terrible remonstrance against Christmas day, grounded upon divine Scriptures, 2 Cor. v. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 14, 17; and in honor of the Lord's Day, grounded upon these Scriptures, John xx. 1; Rev. i. 10; Psalm cxviii. 24; Lev. xxiii.

7, 11; Mark xv. 8; Psalm lxxxiv. 10, in which Christmas is called Antichrist's masse, and those Massemongers and Papists who observe it, etc. In consequence of which Parliament spent some time in consultation about the abolition of Christmas day, passed orders to that effect, and resolved to sit on the following day, which was commonly called Christmas day."—IRVING'S NOTE.

² Cf. p. 47 and note 2.

and that Christmas had been brought in again triumphantly with the merry court of King Charles at the Restoration. He kindled into warmth with the ardor of his contest, and the host of imaginary foes with whom he had to combat; he had a stubborn conflict with old Prynne¹ and two or three other forgotten champions of the Roundheads, on the subject of Christmas festivity; and concluded by urging his hearers in the most solemn and affecting manner to stand to the traditional customs of their fathers, and feast and make merry on this joyful anniversary of the Church.

I have seldom known a sermon attended apparently with more immediate effects; for on leaving the church the congregation seemed one and all possessed with the gayety of spirit so earnestly enjoined by their pastor. The elder folks gathered in knots in the churchyard, greeting and shaking hands; and the children ran about crying "Ule! Ule!" and repeating some uncouth rhymes,² which the parson, who had joined us, informed me had been handed down from days of yore. The villagers doffed their hats to the squire as he passed, giving him the good wishes of the season with every appearance of heartfelt sincerity, and were invited by him to the hall to take something to keep out the cold of the weather; and I heard blessings uttered by several of the poor, which convinced me that in the midst of his enjoyments the worthy old cavalier had not forgotten the true Christmas virtue of charity.

On our way homeward his heart seemed overflowed with generous and happy feelings. As we passed over a rising ground which commanded something of a prospect, the sounds of rustic merriment now and then reached our ears. The squire paused for a few moments, and looked around with

¹ William Prynne was a strong Puritan, who, in 1633, published a vigorous attack against actors and stage plays, and many of the games of old England.

² Ule! Ule!
Three puddings in a pule
Crack nuts and cry ule!

—IRVING'S NOTE.

an air of inexpressible benignity. The beauty of the day was of itself sufficient to inspire philanthropy. Notwithstanding the frostiness of the morning, the sun in his cloudless journey had acquired sufficient power to melt away the thin covering of snow from every southern declivity, and to bring out the living green which adorns an English landscape even in mid-winter. Large tracts of smiling verdure contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of the shaded slopes and hollows. Every sheltered bank on which the broad rays rested yielded its silver rill of cold and limpid water glittering through the dripping grass, and sent up slight exhalations to contribute to the thin haze that hung just above the surface of the earth. There was something truly cheering in this triumph of warmth and verdure over the frosty thralldom of winter; it was, as the squire observed, an emblem of Christmas hospitality breaking through the chills of ceremony and selfishness and thawing every heart into a flow. He pointed with pleasure to the indications of good cheer reeking¹ from the chimneys of the comfortable farmhouses and low thatched cottages. "I love," said he, "to see this day well kept by rich and poor; it is a great thing to have one day in the year, at least, when you are sure of being welcome wherever you go, and of having, as it were, the world thrown all open to you; and I am almost disposed to join with Poor Robin in his malediction on every churlish enemy to this honest festival:

Those who at Christmas do repine
 And would fain hence dispatch him,
 May they with old Duke Humphry dine,
 Or else may Squire Ketch catch 'em.

The squire went on to lament the deplorable decay of the games and amusements which were once prevalent at this season among the lower orders and countenanced by the higher; when the old halls of the castles and manor-houses

¹ The word is here used, correctly, of smoke.

were thrown open at daylight; when the tables were covered with brawn and beef and humming ale; when the harp and the carol resounded all day long, and when rich and poor were alike welcome to enter and make merry.¹ "Our old games and local customs," said he, "had a great effect in making the peasant fond of his home, and the promotion of them by the gentry made him fond of his lord. They made the times merrier and kinder and better, and I can truly say, with one of our old poets:

I like them well; the curious preciseness
 And all-pretended gravity of those
 That seek to banish hence these harmless sports,
 Have thrust away much ancient honesty.

"The nation," continued he, "is altered; we have almost lost our simple true-hearted peasantry. They have broken asunder from the higher classes, and seem to think their interests are separate. They have become too knowing, and begin to read newspapers, listen to ale-house politicians, and talk of reform. I think one mode to keep them in good humor in these hard times would be for the nobility and gentry to pass more time on their estates, mingle more among the country people, and set the merry old English games going again."

Such was the good squire's project for mitigating public discontent; and indeed he had once attempted to put his doctrine in practice, and a few years before had kept open house during the holidays in the old style. The country people, however, did not understand how to play their parts in the scene of hospitality; many uncouth circumstances occurred;

¹ "An English gentleman, at the opening of the great day, *i.e.*, on Christmas day in the morning, had all his tenants and neighbors enter his hall by daybreak. The strong beer was broached, and the blackjacks went plentifully about with toast, sugar and nutmeg, and good Cheshire

cheese. The Hackin (the great sausage) must be boiled by daybreak, or else two young men must take the maiden (*i.e.*, the cook) by the arms, and run her round the market-place till she is shamed of her laziness."—*Round about our Sea-Coal Fire.*

the manor was overrun by all the vagrants of the country, and more beggars drawn into the neighborhood in one week than the parish officers could get rid of in a year. Since then he had contented himself with inviting the decent part of the neighboring peasantry to call at the hall on Christmas day, and with distributing beef and bread and ale among the poor, that they might make merry in their own dwellings.

We had not been long home when the sound of music was heard from a distance. A band of country lads without coats, their shirt sleeves fancifully tied with ribbons, their hats decorated with greens, and clubs in their hands, were seen advancing up the avenue, followed by a large number of villagers and peasantry. They stopped before the hall door, where the music struck up a peculiar air, and the lads performed a curious and intricate dance, advancing, retreating, and striking their clubs together, keeping exact time to the music; while one, whimsically crowned with a fox's skin, the tail of which flaunted down his back, kept capering round the skirts of the dance, and rattling a Christmas box with many antic gesticulations.

The squire eyed this fanciful exhibition with great interest and delight, and gave me a full account of its origin, which he traced to the times when the Romans held possession of the island; plainly proving that this was a lineal descendant of the sword dance of the ancients. "It was now," he said, "nearly extinct, but he had accidentally met with traces of it in the neighborhood, and had encouraged its revival; though, to tell the truth, it was too apt to be followed up by the rough cudgel play, and broken heads in the evening."

After the dance was concluded, the whole party was entertained with brawn and beef and stout home-brewed. The squire himself mingled among the rustics, and was received with awkward demonstrations of deference and regard. It is true I perceived two or three of the younger peasants, as they were raising their tankards to their mouths when the

squire's back was turned, making something of a grimace and giving each other the wink; but the moment they caught my eye they pulled grave faces, and were exceedingly demure. With Master Simon, however, they all seemed more at their ease. His varied occupations and amusements had made him well known throughout the neighborhood. He was a visitor at every farmhouse and cottage, gossiped with the farmers and their wives, romped with their daughters, and like that type of a vagrant bachelor, the humblebee, tolled¹ the sweets from all the rosy lips of the country round.

The bashfulness of the guests soon gave way before good cheer and affability. There is something genuine and affectionate in the gayety of the lower orders when it is excited by the bounty and familiarity of those above them; the warm glow of gratitude enters into their mirth, and a kind word or a small pleasantry frankly uttered by a patron gladdens the heart of the dependent more than oil and wine. When the squire had retired, the merriment increased, and there was much joking and laughter, particularly between Master Simon and a hale, ruddy-faced, white-headed farmer, who appeared to be the wit of the village; for I observed all his companions to wait with open mouths for his retorts, and burst into a gratuitous laugh before they could well understand them.

The whole house indeed seemed abandoned to merriment; as I passed to my room to dress for dinner, I heard the sound of music in a small court, and looking through a window that commanded it, I perceived a band of wandering musicians, with pandean pipes and tambourine; a pretty coquettish housemaid was dancing a jig with a smart country lad, while several of the other servants were looking on. In the midst of her sport the girl caught a glimpse of my face at the window, and, coloring up, ran off with an air of roguish affected confusion.

¹ took toll of.

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

Lo, now is come our joyful'st feast!
 Let every man be jolly.
 Each room with yvie leaves is drest,
 And every post with holly.
 Now all our neighbors' chimneys smoke,
 And Christmas blocks are burning;
 Their ovens they with bak't meats choke
 And all their spits are turning.
 Without the door let sorrow lie,
 And if, for cold, it hap to die
 Wee'le bury 't in a Christmas pye,
 And evermore be merry.

WITHER'S JUVENILIA.¹

I HAD finished my toilet, and was loitering with Frank Bracebridge in the library, when we heard a distant thwacking sound, which he informed me was a signal for the serving up of the dinner. The squire kept up old customs in kitchen as well as hall; and the rolling-pin struck upon the dresser by the cook summoned the servants to carry in the meats.

Just in this nick the cook knock'd thrice,
 And all the waiters in a trice
 His summons did obey;
 Each serving-man, with dish in hand,
 March'd boldly up, like our train band,
 Presented, and away.²

The dinner was served up in the great hall, where the squire always held his Christmas banquet. A blazing, crackling fire of logs had been heaped on to warm the spacious apartment, and the flame went sparkling and wreathing up the

¹ George Wither, 1588-1667, wrote much poetry, but his best was included in the collection called *Juvenilia*, written during his youth. This is from one called

"A Christmas Carol."

² From "A Ballad of a Wedding," by Sir John Suckling, one of the Cavalier Poets of the 17th century.

wide-mouthed chimney. The great picture of the crusader and his white horse had been profusely decorated with greens for the occasion; and holly and ivy had likewise been wreathed round the helmet and weapons on the opposite wall, which I understood were the arms of the same warrior. I must own, by the by, I had strong doubts about the authenticity of the painting and armor as having belonged to the crusader, they certainly having the stamp of more recent days; but I was told that the painting had been so considered time out of mind; and that, as to the armor, it had been found in a lumber room and elevated to its present situation by the squire, who at once determined it to be the armor of the family hero; and as he was absolute authority on all such subjects in his own household, the matter had passed into current acceptance. A sideboard was set out just under this chivalric trophy, on which was a display of plate that might have vied (at least in variety) with Belshazzar's parade of the vessels of the temple; "flagons, cans, cups, beakers, goblets, basins, and ewers," the gorgeous utensils of good companionship that had gradually accumulated through many generations of jovial housekeepers. Before these stood two Yule candles beaming like two stars of the first magnitude; other lights were distributed in branches, and the whole array glittered like a firmament of silver.

We were ushered into this banqueting scene with the sound of minstrelsy, the old harper being seated on a stool beside the fireplace, and twanging his instrument with a vast deal more power than melody. Never did Christmas board display a more goodly and gracious assemblage of countenances; those who were not handsome were at least happy; and happiness is a rare improver of your hard-favored visage. I always consider an old English family as well worth studying as a collection of Holbein's¹ portraits or Albert Dürer's² prints.

¹ Hans Holbein, the younger (1497-1543), was a German artist of great genius in portraiture: his drawings of English men

and women of the 16th century are most interesting.

² Albert Dürer (1471-1528) was one of

There is much antiquarian lore to be acquired; much knowledge of the physiognomies of former times. Perhaps it may be from having continually before their eyes those rows of old family portraits with which the mansions of this country are stocked; certain it is that the quaint features of antiquity are often most faithfully perpetuated in these ancient lines; and I have traced an old family nose through a whole picture gallery, legitimately handed down from generation to generation, almost from the time of the Conquest. Something of the kind was to be observed in the worthy company around me. Many of their faces had evidently originated in a Gothic age, and been merely copied by succeeding generations; and there was one little girl in particular, of staid demeanor, with a high Roman nose and an antique vinegar aspect, who was a great favorite of the squire's, being, as he said, a Bracebridge all over, and the very counterpart of one of his ancestors who figured in the court of Henry VIII.

The parson said grace, which was not a short familiar one, such as is commonly addressed to the Deity in these unceremonious days, but a long, courtly, well-worded one of the ancient school. There was now a pause, as if something was expected, when suddenly the butler entered the hall with some degree of bustle; he was attended by a servant on each side with a large waxlight, and bore a silver dish on which was an enormous pig's head decorated with rosemary, with a lemon in its mouth, which was placed with great formality at the head of the table. The moment this pageant made its appearance, the harper struck up a flourish; at the conclusion of which the young Oxonian, on receiving a hint from the squire, gave, with an air of the most comic gravity, an old carol, the first verse of which was as follows:

Caput apri defero
Reddens laudes Domino.

the most famous of German artists; his chief works are etchings and engravings.

The boar's head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary.
I pray you all synge merrily
Qui estis in convivio.¹

Though prepared to witness many of these little eccentricities, from being apprised of the peculiar hobby of mine host, yet I confess the parade with which so odd a dish was introduced somewhat perplexed me, until I gathered from the conversation of the squire and the parson that it was meant to represent the bringing in of the boar's head, a dish formerly served up with much ceremony and the sound of minstrelsy and song, at great tables on Christmas day. "I like the old custom," said the squire, "not merely because it is stately and pleasing in itself, but because it was observed at the college at Oxford at which I was educated. When I hear the old song chanted, it brings to mind the time when I was young and gamesome—and the noble old college hall—and my fellow-students loitering about in their black gowns; many of whom, poor lads, are now in their graves!"

The parson, however, whose mind was not haunted by such associations, and who was always more taken up with the text than the sentiment, objected to the Oxonian's version of the carol, which he affirmed was different from that sang at college. He went on, with the dry perseverance of a commentator, to give the college reading, accompanied by sundry annotations, addressing himself at first to the company at large; but finding their attention gradually diverted to other talk and other objects, he lowered his tone as his number of auditors diminished, until he concluded his remarks in an under voice to a fat-headed old gentleman next him, who was silently engaged in the discussion of a huge plateful of turkey.²

¹ See the note on p. 72 for the whole song. The Latin may be translated "The boar's head I bring, returning thanks to the Lord;" and the last line (following

"you all") "who are at the banquet."

² The old ceremony of serving up the boar's head on Christmas day is still observed in the hall of Queen's College, Ox-

The table was literally loaded with good cheer, and presented an epitome of country abundance in this season of overflowing larders. A distinguished post was allotted to "ancient sirloin," as mine host termed it; being, as he added, "the standard of old English hospitality, and a joint of goodly presence, and full of expectation." There were several dishes quaintly decorated, and which had evidently something traditional in their embellishments; but about which, as I did not like to appear over-curious, I asked no questions.

I could not, however, but notice a pie, magnificently decorated with peacock's feathers, in imitation of the tail of that bird, which overshadowed a considerable tract of the table. This, the squire confessed with some little hesitation, was a pheasant pie, though a peacock pie was certainly the most authentic; but there had been such a mortality among the peacocks this season that he could not prevail upon himself to have one killed.¹

It would be tedious, perhaps, to my wiser readers, who may not have that foolish fondness for odd and obsolete things to which I am a little given, were I to mention the other make-

ford. I was favored by the parson with a copy of the carol as now sung, and as it may be acceptable to such of my readers as are curious in these grave and learned matters, I give it entire.

The boar's head in hand bear I,
Bedeck'd with bays and rosemary;
And I pray you, my masters, be merry
Quot estis in convivio.
Caput aprî defero,
Reddens laudes Domino.

The boar's head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this land,
Which thus bedeck'd with a gay garland
Let us servire cantico.
Caput aprî defero, etc.

Our steward hath provided this
In honor of the King of Bliss,
Which on this day to be served is
In Reginensi Atrio.
Caput aprî defero,
etc., etc., etc.

—IRVING'S NOTE.

¹ The peacock was anciently in great demand for stately entertainments. Some-

times it was made into a pie, at one end of which the head appeared above the crust in all its plumage, with the beak richly gilt; at the other end the tail was displayed. Such pies were served up at the solemn banquets of chivalry, when knights-errant pledged themselves to undertake any perilous enterprise, whence came the ancient oath, used by Justice Shallow, "by cock and pie."

The peacock was also an important dish for the Christmas feast; and Massinger, in his *City Madam*, gives some idea of the extravagance with which this, as well as other dishes, was prepared for the gorgeous revels of the olden times:

Men may talk of Country Christmasses,
Their thirty pound butter'd eggs, their
pies of carps' tongues;
Their pheasants drench'd with ambergris;
*the carcasses of three fat wethers bruised
for gravy to make sauce for a single
peacock.*
—IRVING'S NOTE.

shifts of this worthy old humorist, by which he was endeavoring to follow up, though at humble distance, the quaint customs of antiquity. I was pleased, however, to see the respect shown to his whims by his children and relatives, who, indeed, entered readily into the full spirit of them, and seemed all well versed in their parts, having doubtless been present at many a rehearsal. I was amused, too, at the air of profound gravity with which the butler and other servants executed the duties assigned them, however eccentric. They had an old-fashioned look,—having, for the most part, been brought up in the household, and grown into keeping with the antiquated mansion and the humors of its lord,—and most probably looked upon all his whimsical regulations as the established laws of honorable housekeeping.

When the cloth was removed, the butler brought in a huge silver vessel of rare and curious workmanship, which he placed before the squire. Its appearance was hailed with acclamation, being the Wassail Bowl, so renowned in Christmas festivity. The contents had been prepared by the squire himself; for it was a beverage in the skilful mixture of which he particularly prided himself, alleging that it was too abstruse and complex for the comprehension of an ordinary servant. It was a potation, indeed, that might well make the heart of a toper leap within him, being composed of the richest and raciest wines, highly spiced and sweetened, with roasted apples bobbing about the surface.¹

The old gentleman's whole countenance beamed with a serene look of indwelling delight, as he stirred this mighty bowl. Having raised it to his lips, with a hearty wish of a

¹ The Wassail Bowl was sometimes composed of ale instead of wine, with nutmeg, sugar, toast, ginger, and roasted crabs; in this way the nut-brown beverage is still prepared in some old families, and round the hearths of substantial farmers at Christmas. It is also called Lamb's Wool,

and is celebrated by Herrick in his *Twelfth Night*:

Next crowne the bowle full
With gentle Lamb's Wool;
Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger,
With store of ale too;
And thus ye must doe
To make the Wassaille a swinger.

—IRVING'S NOTE.

merry Christmas to all present, he sent it brimming round the board for every one to follow his example, according to the primitive style—pronouncing it “the ancient fountain of good feeling, where all hearts met together.”¹

There was much laughing and rallying as the honest emblem of Christmas joviality circulated, and was kissed rather coyly by the ladies. When it reached Master Simon, he raised it in both hands, and with the air of a boon companion struck up an old Wassail chanson.

The brown bowle
 The merry brown bowle,
 As it goes round about-a,
 Fill
 Still,
 Let the world say what it will,
 And drink your fill all out-a.

The deep canne,
 The merry deep canne,
 As thou dost freely quaff-a,
 Sing
 Fling,
 Be as merry as a king,
 And sound a lusty laugh-a.²

Much of the conversation during dinner turned upon family topics to which I was a stranger. There was, however, a great deal of rallying of Master Simon about some gay widow, with whom he was accused of having a flirtation. This attack was commenced by the ladies; but it was continued throughout the dinner by the fat-headed old gentleman next the parson, with the persevering assiduity of a slow hound; being one of those long-winded jokers who, though rather dull

¹ “The custom of drinking out of the same cup gave place to each having his cup. When the steward came to the doore with the Wassel, he was to cry three

times, *Wassel, Wassel, Wassel*, and then the chappell (chaplein) was to answer with a song.”—IRVING’S NOTE.

² From *Poor Robin’s Almanac*.

at starting game, are unrivalled for their talents in hunting it down. At every pause in the general conversation he renewed his bantering in pretty much the same terms, winking hard at me with both eyes whenever he gave Master Simon what he considered a home thrust. The latter, indeed, seemed fond of being teased on the subject, as old bachelors are apt to be; and he took occasion to inform me, in an undertone, that the lady in question was a prodigiously fine woman and drove her own curricule.

The dinner-time passed away in this flow of innocent hilarity, and though the old hall may have resounded in its time with many a scene of broader rout and revel, yet I doubt whether it ever witnessed more honest and genuine enjoyment. How easy it is for one benevolent being to diffuse pleasure around him; and how truly is a kind heart a fountain of gladness, making everything in its vicinity to freshen into smiles! The joyous disposition of the worthy squire was perfectly contagious; he was happy himself, and disposed to make all the world happy; and the little eccentricities of his humor did but season, in a manner, the sweetness of his philanthropy.

When the ladies had retired, the conversation, as usual, became still more animated; many good things were broached which had been thought of during dinner, and though I cannot positively affirm that there was much wit uttered, yet I have certainly heard many contests of rare wit produce much less laughter. Wit, after all, is a mighty tart, pungent ingredient, and much too acid for some stomachs; but honest good humor is the oil and wine of a merry meeting, and there is no jovial companionship equal to that where the jokes are rather small and the laughter abundant.

The squire told several long stories of early college pranks and adventures, in some of which the parson had been a sharer; though in looking at the latter it required some effort of imagination to figure such a riddle, dark anatomy¹ of a man

¹ in the older meaning of "skeleton."

into the perpetrator of a madcap gambol. Indeed, the two college chums presented pictures of what men may be made by their different lots in life. The squire had left the university to live lustily on his paternal domains, in the vigorous enjoyment of prosperity and sunshine, and had flourished on to a hearty and florid old age; whilst the poor parson, on the contrary, had dried and withered away, among dusty tomes, in the silence and shadows of his study. Still there seemed to be a spark of almost extinguished fire feebly glimmering in the bottom of his soul; and as the squire hinted at a sly story of the parson and a pretty milkmaid, whom they once met on the banks of the Isis, the old gentleman made an "alphabet of faces," which, as far as I could decipher his physiognomy, I verily believe was indicative of laughter;—indeed, I have rarely met with an old gentleman that took absolute offence at the imputed gallantries of his youth.

I found the tide of wine and wassail fast gaining on the dry land of sober judgment. The company grew merrier and louder as their jokes grew duller. Master Simon was in as chirping a humor as a grasshopper filled with dew; his old songs grew of a warmer complexion, and he began to talk maudlin about the widow. He even gave a long song about the wooing of a widow, which he informed me he had gathered from an excellent black-letter work, entitled *Cupid's Solicitor for Love*, containing store of good advice for bachelors, and which he promised to lend me. The first verse was to this effect:

He that will woo a widow must not dally,
He must make hay while the sun doth shine;
He must not stand with her, shall I, shall I,
But boldly say, "Widow, thou must be mine."

This song inspired the fat-headed old gentleman, who made several attempts to tell a rather broad story out of Joe Miller, that was pat to the purpose; but he always stuck in the

middle, everybody recollecting the latter part excepting himself. The parson, too, began to show the effects of good cheer, having gradually settled down into a doze, and his wig sitting most suspiciously on one side. Just at this juncture we were summoned to the drawing-room, and, I suspect, at the private instigation of mine host, whose joviality seemed always tempered with a proper love of decorum.

After the dinner table was removed, the hall was given up to the younger members of the family, who, prompted to all kind of noisy mirth by the Oxonian and Master Simon, made its old walls ring with their merriment, as they played at romping games. I delight in witnessing the gambols of children, and particularly at this happy holiday season, and could not help stealing out of the drawing-room on hearing one of their peals of laughter. I found them at the game of blindman's-buff. Master Simon, who was the leader of their revels, and seemed on all occasions to fulfil the office of that ancient potentate, the Lord of Misrule,¹ was blinded in the midst of the hall. The little beings were as busy about him as the mock fairies about Falstaff;² pinching him, plucking at the skirts of his coat, and tickling him with straws. One fine blue-eyed girl of about thirteen, with her flaxen hair all in beautiful confusion, her frolic face in a glow, her frock half torn off her shoulders, a complete picture of a romp, was the chief tormentor; and, from the slyness with which Master Simon avoided the smaller game, and hemmed this wild little nymph in corners, and obliged her to jump shrieking over chairs, I suspected the rogue of being not a whit more blinded than was convenient.

When I returned to the drawing-room, I found the company seated round the fire, listening to the parson, who was deeply ensconced in a high-backed oaken chair, the work of

¹ At Christmasse there was in the Kinge's house, wheresoever hee was lodged, a lorde of misrule, or mayster of merie disportes, and the like had ye in the house of every

nobleman of honor, or good worshippe, were he spiritual or temporall.—Stowe.

² in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v.

some cunning artificer of yore, which had been brought from the library for his particular accommodation. From this venerable piece of furniture, with which his shadowy figure and dark weazen face so admirably accorded, he was dealing out strange accounts of the popular superstitions and legends of the surrounding country, with which he had become acquainted in the course of his antiquarian researches. I am half inclined to think that the old gentleman was himself somewhat tinctured with superstition, as men are very apt to be who live a recluse and studious life in a sequestered part of the country, and pore over black-letter tracts, so often filled with the marvellous and supernatural. He gave us several anecdotes of the fancies of the neighboring peasantry concerning the effigy of the crusader which lay on the tomb by the church altar. As it was the only monument of the kind in that part of the country, it had always been regarded with feelings of superstition by the good wives of the village. It was said to get up from the tomb and walk the rounds of the churchyard in stormy nights, particularly when it thundered; and one old woman, whose cottage bordered on the churchyard, had seen it through the windows of the church when the moon shone, slowly pacing up and down the aisles. It was the belief that some wrong had been left unredressed by the deceased, or some treasure hidden, which kept the spirit in a state of trouble and restlessness. Some talked of gold and jewels buried in the tomb, over which the spectre kept watch; and there was a story current of a sexton in old times who endeavored to break his way to the coffin at night, but, just as he reached it, received a violent blow from the marble hand of the effigy, which stretched him senseless on the pavement. These tales were often laughed at by some of the sturdier among the rustics, yet, when night came on, there were many of the stoutest unbelievers that were shy of venturing alone in the footpath that led across the churchyard.

From these and other anecdotes that followed, the crusader

appeared to be the favorite hero of ghost stories throughout the vicinity. His picture, which hung up in the hall, was thought by the servants to have something supernatural about it; for they remarked that in whatever part of the hall you went, the eyes of the warrior were still fixed on you. The old porter's wife, too, at the lodge, who had been born and brought up in the family, and was a great gossip among the maid servants, affirmed that in her young days she had often heard say that on Midsummer eve, when it was well known all kinds of ghosts, goblins, and fairies become visible and walk abroad, the crusader used to mount his horse, come down from his picture, ride about the house, down the avenue, and so to the church to visit the tomb; on which occasion the church door most civilly swung open of itself; not that he needed it, for he rode through closed gates and even stone walls, and had been seen by one of the dairymaids to pass between two bars of the great park gate, making himself as thin as a sheet of paper.

All these superstitions I found had been very much countenanced by the squire, who, though not superstitious himself, was very fond of seeing others so. He listened to every goblin tale of the neighboring gossips with infinite gravity, and held the porter's wife in high favor on account of her talent for the marvellous. He was himself a great reader of old legends and romances, and often lamented that he could not believe in them; for a superstitious person, he thought, must live in a kind of fairyland.

Whilst we were all attention to the parson's stories, our ears were suddenly assailed by a burst of heterogeneous sounds from the hall, in which were mingled something like the clang of rude minstrelsy with the uproar of many small voices and girlish laughter. The door suddenly flew open, and a train came trooping into the room that might almost have been mistaken for the breaking up of the court of Fairy. That indefatigable spirit, Master Simon, in the faithful discharge of

his duties as Lord of Misrule, had conceived the idea of a Christmas mummerly, or masking; and having called in to his assistance the Oxonian and the young officer, who were equally ripe for anything that should occasion romping and merriment, they had carried it into instant effect. The old housekeeper had been consulted; the antique clothespresses and wardrobes rummaged, and made to yield up the relics of finery that had not seen the light for several generations; the younger part of the company had been privately convened from the parlor and hall, and the whole had been bedizened out into a burlesque imitation of an antique mask.¹

Master Simon led the van, as Ancient Christmas, quaintly apparelled in a ruff, a short cloak which had very much the aspect of one of the old housekeeper's petticoats, and a hat that might have served for a village steeple, and must indubitably have figured in the days of the Covenanters.² From under this his nose curved boldly forth, flushed with a frost-bitten bloom that seemed the very trophy of a December blast. He was accompanied by the blue-eyed romp, dished up as Dame Mince Pie, in the venerable magnificence of a faded brocade, long stomacher, peaked hat, and high-heeled shoes. The young officer appeared as Robin Hood,³ in a sporting dress of Kendal Green, and a foraging cap with a gold tassel.

The costume, to be sure, did not bear testimony to deep research, and there was an evident eye to the picturesque, natural to a young gallant in the presence of his mistress. The fair Julia hung on his arm in a pretty rustic dress as Maid Marian. The rest of the train had been metamorphosed in various ways; the girls trussed up in the finery of the ancient belles of the Bracebridge line, and the striplings be-

¹ Maskings, or mummeries, were favorite sports at Christmas in old times; and the wardrobes at halls and manor houses were often laid under contribution to furnish dresses and fantastic disguisings. I strongly suspect Master Simon to have taken the idea of his from Ben Jonson's

Masque of Christmas.—IRVING.

² The Scotch Presbyterians, who were adherents to the Solemn League and Covenant, 1638.

³ Robin Hood and Maid Marian are two of the most famous of England's legendary characters.

whiskered with burnt cork, and gravely clad in broad skirts, hanging sleeves, and full-bottomed wigs, to represent the character of Roast Beef, Plum-pudding, and other worthies celebrated in ancient maskings. The whole was under the control of the Oxonian, in the appropriate character of Misrule; and I observed that he exercised rather a mischievous sway with his wand over the smaller personages of the pageant.

The irruption of this motley crew with beat of drum, according to ancient custom, was the consummation of uproar and merriment. Master Simon covered himself with glory by the stateliness with which, as Ancient Christmas, he walked a minuet with the peerless, though giggling, Dame Mince Pie. It was followed by a dance of all the characters, which from its medley of costumes seemed as though the old family portraits had skipped down from their frames to join in the sport. Different centuries were figuring at cross hands and right and left; the dark ages were cutting pirouettes and rigadoons; and the days of Queen Bess jiggling merrily down the middle, through a line of succeeding generations.

The worthy squire contemplated these fantastic sports and this resurrection of his old wardrobe with the simple relish of childish delight. He stood chuckling and rubbing his hands, and scarcely hearing a word the parson said, notwithstanding that the latter was discoursing most authentically on the ancient and stately dance of the Pavon, or peacock, from which he conceived the minuet to be derived.¹ For my part, I was in a continual excitement from the varied scenes of whim and innocent gayety passing before me. It was inspiring to see wild-eyed frolic and warm-hearted hospitality breaking out from among the chills and glooms of winter,

¹ Sir John Hawkins, speaking of the dance called the Pavon, from pavo, a peacock, says: "It is a grave and majestic dance; the method of dancing it anciently was by gentlemen dressed with caps and

swords, by those of the long robe in their gowns, by the peers in their mantles, and by the ladies in gowns with long trains, the motion whereof, in dancing, resembled that of a peacock."—*History of Music.*

and old age throwing off his apathy and catching once more the freshness of youthful enjoyment. I felt also an interest in the scene from the consideration that these fleeting customs were posting fast into oblivion, and that this was, perhaps, the only family in England in which the whole of them was still punctiliously observed. There was a quaintness, too, mingled with all this revelry that gave it a peculiar zest; it was suited to the time and place; and as the old manor house almost reeled with mirth and wassail, it seemed echoing back the joviality of long departed years.¹

But enough of Christmas and its gambols; it is time for me to pause in this garrulity. Methinks I hear the questions asked by my graver readers, "To what purpose is all this—how is the world to be made wiser by this talk?" Alas! is there not wisdom enough extant for the instruction of the world? And if not, are there not thousands of abler pens laboring for its improvement?—It is so much pleasanter to please than to instruct—to play the companion rather than the preceptor.

What, after all, is the mite of wisdom that I could throw into the mass of knowledge; or how am I sure that my sagest deductions may be safe guides for the opinions of others? But in writing to amuse, if I fail, the only evil is in my own disappointment. If, however, I can by any lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sorrow; if I can now and then penetrate through the gathering film of misanthropy, prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in good humor with his fellow-beings and himself, surely, surely, I shall not then have written entirely in vain.

¹ At the time of the first publication of this paper, the picture of an old-fashioned Christmas in the country was pronounced by some as out of date. The author had afterwards an opportunity of witnessing almost all the customs above described,

existing in unexpected vigor in the skirts of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, where he passed the Christmas holidays. The reader will find some notice of them in the author's account of his sojourn at Newstead Abbey.—IRVING.

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

Thou soft-flowing Avon, by thy silver stream
 Of things more than mortal sweet Shakespeare would dream;
 The fairies by moonlight dance round his green bed,
 For hallow'd the turf is which pillow'd his head.

GARRICK.¹

To a homeless man, who has no spot on this wide world which he can truly call his own, there is a momentary feeling of something like independence and territorial consequence, when, after a weary day's travel, he kicks off his boots, thrusts his feet into slippers, and stretches himself before an inn fire. Let the world without go as it may, let kingdoms rise or fall, so long as he has the wherewithal to pay his bill, he is for the time being the very monarch of all he surveys. The arm-chair is his throne, the poker his sceptre, and the little parlor, some twelve feet square, his undisputed empire. It is a morsel of certainty snatched from the midst of the uncertainties of life, it is a sunny moment gleaming out kindly on a cloudy day; and he who has advanced some way on the pilgrimage of existence knows the importance of husbanding even morsels and moments of enjoyment. "Shall I not take mine ease in mine inn?" thought I, as I gave the fire a stir, lolled back in my elbow-chair, and cast a complacent look about the little parlor of the Red Horse at Stratford-on-Avon.

The words of sweet Shakespeare² were just passing through my mind as the clock struck midnight from the tower of the church in which he lies buried. There was a gentle tap at the door, and a pretty chambermaid, putting in her smiling face, inquired with a hesitating air whether I had rung. I

¹ David Garrick (1716-1779) was the most famous Shakespearean actor of the 18th century. These lines are from his ode to Shakespeare recited at the Shake-

spere Jubilee of 1769.

² The words just quoted are Falstaff's, in 1, *Henry IV.*, III, iii, 78.

understood it as a modest hint that it was time to retire. My dream of absolute dominion was at an end; so abdicating my throne like a prudent potentate, to avoid being deposed, and putting the Stratford Guide-Book under my arm as a pillow companion, I went to bed, and dreamt all night of Shakespeare, the Jubilee, and David Garrick.

The next morning was one of those quickening mornings which we sometimes have in early spring, for it was about the middle of March. The chills of a long winter had suddenly given way, the north wind had spent its last gasp, and a mild air came stealing from the west, breathing the breath of life into nature and wooing every bud and flower to burst forth into fragrance and beauty.

I had come to Stratford on a poetical pilgrimage. My first visit was to the house where Shakespeare was born,¹ and where, according to tradition, he was brought up to his father's craft of wool-combing. It is a small, mean-looking edifice of wood and plaster, a true nestling-place of genius, which seems to delight in hatching its offspring in by-corners. The walls of its squalid chambers are covered with names and inscriptions in every language, by pilgrims of all nations, ranks, and conditions, from the prince to the peasant, and present a simple but striking instance of the spontaneous and universal homage of mankind to the great poet of nature.

The house is shown by a garrulous old lady in a frosty red face lighted up by a cold blue, anxious eye, and garnished with artificial locks of flaxen hair curling from under an exceedingly dirty cap. She was peculiarly assiduous in exhibiting the relics with which this, like all other celebrated shrines, abounds. There was the shattered stock of the very matchlock² with which Shakespeare shot the deer on his poaching exploits. There, too, was his tobacco box, which proves that

¹ This house on Henley St., Stratford, was long inhabited by descendants of the poet's sister, but in 1846 was converted into a public museum and afterwards presented

to the town of Stratford.

² The matchlock was the form of musket in use before the flintlock, which preceded the use of percussion caps and cartridges.

he was a rival smoker of Sir Walter Raleigh; the sword also with which he played Hamlet;¹ and the identical lantern with which Friar Laurence discovered Romeo and Juliet at the tomb! There was an ample supply also of Shakespeare's mulberry tree, which seems to have as extraordinary powers of self-multiplication as the wood of the true cross, of which there is enough extant to build a ship of the line.²

The most favorite object of curiosity, however, is Shakespeare's chair. It stands in the chimney nook of a small gloomy chamber, just behind what was his father's shop. Here he may many a time have sat when a boy, watching the slowly revolving spit with all the longing of an urchin, or of an evening listening to the cronies and gossips of Stratford dealing forth churchyard tales and legendary anecdotes of the troublesome times of England. In this chair it is the custom of every one that visits the house to sit,—whether this be done with the hope of imbibing any of the inspiration of the bard I am at a loss to say, I merely mention the fact,—and mine hostess privately assured me that, though built of solid oak, such was the fervent zeal of devotees that the chair had to be new bottomed at least once in three years. It is worthy of notice also, in the history of this extraordinary chair, that it partakes something of the volatile nature of the Santa Casa of Loretto³ or the flying chair of the Arabian enchanter;⁴ for though sold some few years since to a northern princess, yet, strange to tell, it has found its way back again to the old chimney corner.

I am always of easy faith in such matters, and am ever willing to be deceived where the deceit is pleasant and costs

¹ The tradition now is that Shakespeare played the Ghost in his great tragedy. Irving's account of these relics, however, is humorous; as he says later he is "of easy faith in such matters."

² Before steam became an important element in shipbuilding, the largest men-of-war were called "ships of the line,"

which was short for "line of battle."

³ The famous shrine at Loretto, reputed to be the veritable house of the Virgin, transported by angels from Nazareth, and miraculously set down in Italy on December 10, 1294.

⁴ It is generally called a flying carpet in the *Arabian Nights*.

nothing. I am therefore a ready believer in relics, legends, and local anecdotes of goblins and great men, and would advise all travelers who travel for their gratification to be the same.¹ What is it to us whether these stories be true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into the belief of them and enjoy all the charm of the reality? There is nothing like resolute, good-humored credulity in these matters; and on this occasion I went even so far as willingly to believe the claims of mine hostess to a lineal descent from the poet, when, luckily for my faith, she put into my hands a play of her own composition which set all belief in her consanguinity at defiance.

From the birthplace of Shakespeare a few paces brought me to his grave. He lies buried in the chancel of the parish church, a large and venerable pile, mouldering with age, but richly ornamented. It stands on the banks of the Avon, on an embowered point, and separated by adjoining gardens from the suburbs of the town. Its situation is quiet and retired; the river runs murmuring at the foot of the churchyard, and the elms which grow upon its banks droop their branches into its clear bosom. An avenue of limes, the boughs of which are curiously interlaced so as to form in summer an arched way of foliage, leads up from the gate of the yard to the church porch. The graves are overgrown with grass; the gray tombstones, some of them nearly sunk into the earth, are half covered with moss, which has likewise tinted the reverend old building. Small birds have built their nests among the cornices and fissures of the walls, and keep up a continual flutter and chirping, and rooks are sailing and cawing about its lofty gray spire.

In the course of my rambles I met with the gray-headed sexton, Edmonds, and accompanied him home to get the key of the church. He had lived in Stratford, man and boy, for

¹ This is part of the humor that gives us man of Sleepy Hollow, and the many Rip Van Winkle, The Headless Horse- Knickerbocker legends.

eighty years, and seemed still to consider himself a vigorous man, with the trivial exception that he had nearly lost the use of his legs for a few years past. His dwelling was a cottage looking out upon the Avon and its bordering meadows, and was a picture of that neatness, order, and comfort which pervade the humblest dwellings in this country. A low white-washed room, with a stone floor carefully scrubbed, served for parlor, kitchen, and hall. Rows of pewter and earthen dishes glittered along the dresser. On an old oaken table, well rubbed and polished, lay the family Bible and prayer-book, and the drawer contained the family library, composed of about half a score of well-thumbed volumes. An ancient clock, that important article of cottage furniture, ticked on the opposite side of the room, with a bright warming-pan hanging on one side of it, and the old man's horn-handled Sunday cane on the other. The fireplace, as usual, was wide and deep enough to admit a gossip knot within its jambs. In one corner sat the old man's granddaughter sewing, a pretty blue-eyed girl; and in the opposite corner was a superannuated crony whom he addressed by the name of John Ange, and who, I found, had been his companion from childhood. They had played together in infancy; they had worked together in manhood; they were now tottering about and gossiping away the evening of life; and in a short time they will probably be buried together in the neighboring churchyard. It is not often that we see two streams of existence running thus evenly and tranquilly side by side; it is only in such quiet "bosom scenes" of life that they are to be met with.

I had hoped to gather some traditionary anecdotes of the bard from these ancient chroniclers, but they had nothing new to impart. The long interval during which Shakespeare's writings lay in comparative neglect¹ has spread its shadow over his history, and it is his good or evil lot that scarcely any-

¹ It was the opinion of Irving's day, without very good ground, that Shake-

spere had been very little cared for during the century between 1650 and 1750.

thing remains to his biographers but a scanty handful of conjectures.¹

The sexton and his companion had been employed as carpenters on the preparations for the celebrated Stratford Jubilee, and they remembered Garrick, the prime mover of the fête, who superintended the arrangements, and who, according to the sexton, was "a short punch² man, very lively and bustling." John Ange had assisted also in cutting down Shakespeare's mulberry tree, of which he had a morsel in his pocket for sale, no doubt a sovereign quickener of literary conception.

I was grieved to hear these two worthy wights speak very dubiously of the eloquent dame who shows the Shakespeare house. John Ange shook his head when I mentioned her valuable collection of relics, particularly her remains of the mulberry tree; and the old sexton even expressed a doubt as to Shakespeare having been born in her house. I soon discovered that he looked upon her mansion with an evil eye as a rival to the poet's tomb, the latter having comparatively but few visitors. Thus it is that historians differ at the very outset, and mere pebbles make the stream of truth diverge into different channels even at the fountain head.

We approached the church through the avenue of limes, and entered by a Gothic porch, highly ornamented, with carved doors of massive oak. The interior is spacious, and the architecture and embellishments superior to those of most country churches. There are several ancient monuments of nobility and gentry, over some of which hang funeral escutcheons, and banners dropping piecemeal from the walls. The tomb of Shakespeare is in the chancel. The place is solemn and sepulchral. Tall elms wave before the pointed windows, and the Avon, which runs at a short distance from

¹ Since Irving's day much has been found out of the facts of Shakespeare's life, as may be seen in the life of the poet

by Mr. Sidney Lee.

² a provincial English word for "short and stout."

the walls, keeps up a low perpetual murmur. A flat stone marks the spot where the bard is buried. There are four lines inscribed on it, said to have been written by himself, and which have in them something extremely awful. If they are indeed his own, they show that solicitude about the quiet of the grave which seems natural to fine sensibilities and thoughtful minds.

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be he that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.

Just over the grave, in a niche of the wall, is a bust of Shakespeare, put up shortly after his death, and considered as a resemblance. The aspect is pleasant and serene, with a finely arched forehead, and I thought I could read in it clear indications of that cheerful, social disposition by which he was as much characterized among his contemporaries as by the vastness of his genius. The inscription mentions his age at the time of his decease,—fifty-three years,—an untimely death for the world; for what fruit might not have been expected from the golden autumn of such a mind, sheltered as it was from the stormy vicissitudes of life, and flourishing in the sunshine of popular and royal favor.¹

The inscription on the tombstone has not been without its effect. It has prevented the removal of his remains from the bosom of his native place to Westminster Abbey, which was at one time contemplated. A few years since, also, as some laborers were digging to make an adjoining vault, the earth caved in so as to leave a vacant space almost like an arch, through which one might have reached into his grave. No one, however, presumed to meddle with his remains so awfully guarded by a malediction; and lest any of the idle or the curi-

¹ It must be remembered, however, that Shakespeare had ceased to write plays, and

had left London for Stratford some years before his death.

ous, or any collector of relics, should be tempted to commit depredations, the old sexton kept watch over the place for two days, until the vault was finished and the aperture closed again. He told me that he had made bold to look in at the hole, but could see neither coffin nor bones—nothing but dust. It was something, I thought, to have seen the dust of Shakespeare.

Next to this grave are those of his wife, his favorite daughter, Mrs. Hall, and others of his family. On a tomb close by, also, is a full-length effigy of his old friend, John Combe of usurious memory, on whom he is said to have written a ludicrous epitaph. There are other monuments around, but the mind refuses to dwell on anything that is not connected with Shakespeare. His idea pervades the place, the whole pile seems but as his mausoleum. The feelings, no longer checked and thwarted by doubt, here indulge in perfect confidence; other traces of him may be false or dubious, but here is palpable evidence and absolute certainty. As I trod the sounding pavement, there was something intense and thrilling in the idea that in very truth the remains of Shakespeare were mouldering beneath my feet. It was a long time before I could prevail upon myself to leave the place; and as I passed through the churchyard I plucked a branch from one of the yew trees, the only relic that I have brought from Stratford.

I had now visited the usual objects of a pilgrim's devotion, but I had a desire to see the old family seat of the Lucys, at Charlecote, and to ramble through the park where Shakespeare, in company with some of the roysters of Stratford, committed his youthful offence of deer-stealing. In this hairbrained exploit we are told that he was taken prisoner and carried to the keeper's lodge, where he remained all night in doleful captivity. When brought into the presence of Sir Thomas Lucy his treatment must have been galling and humiliating, for it so wrought upon his spirit as to produce a

rough pasquinade, which was affixed to the park gate at Charlecote.

This flagitious attack upon the dignity of the knight so incensed him, that he applied to a lawyer at Warwick to put the severity of the laws in force against the rhyming deer-stalker. Shakespeare did not wait to brave the united puissance of a knight of the shire and a country attorney. He forthwith abandoned the pleasant banks of the Avon and his paternal trade, wandered away to London, became a hanger-on to the theatres, then an actor, and finally wrote for the stage; and thus, through the persecution of Sir Thomas Lucy, Stratford lost an indifferent wool-comber, and the world gained an immortal poet. He retained, however, for a long time, a sense of the harsh treatment of the Lord of Charlecote, and revenged himself in his writings, but in the sportive way of a good-natured mind. Sir Thomas is said to be the original Justice Shallow,¹ and the satire is slyly fixed upon him by the justice's armorial bearings, which, like those of the knight, had white luces² in the quarterings.

Various attempts have been made by his biographers to soften and explain away this early transgression of the poet; but I look upon it as one of those thoughtless exploits natural to his situation and turn of mind. Shakespeare, when young, had doubtless all the wildness and irregularity of an ardent, undisciplined, and undirected genius. The poetic temperament has naturally something in it of the vagabond. When left to itself it runs loosely and wildly, and delights in everything eccentric and licentious. It is often a turn-up of a die, in the gambling freaks of fate, whether a natural genius shall turn out a great rogue or a great poet; and had not Shakespeare's mind fortunately taken a literary bias, he might have as daringly transcended all civil, as he has all dramatic laws.³

¹ See *Henry IV.*

² The luce is a pike or jack, and abounds in the Avon about Charlecote.

³ This expresses a very common idea of Irving's day, namely that Shakespeare disregarded the laws and customs of the

I have little doubt that in early life, when running, like an unbroken colt about the neighborhood of Stratford, he was to be found in the company of all kinds of odd anomalous characters; that he associated with all the madcaps of the place, and was one of those unlucky urchins at mention of whom old men shake their heads, and predict that they will one day come to the gallows. To him the poaching in Sir Thomas Lucy's park was doubtless like a foray to a Scottish knight, and struck his eager and as yet untamed imagination as something delightfully adventurous.¹

The old mansion of Charlecote and its surrounding park still remain in the possession of the Lucy family, and are peculiarly interesting from being connected with this whimsical but eventful circumstance in the scanty history of the bard. As the house stood but little more than three miles' distance from Stratford, I resolved to pay it a pedestrian visit, that I might stroll leisurely through some of those scenes

drama. It is true that his plays are not like older plays, but they are not unlike the other plays of his time. A statement truer than the idea of the text would be that Shakespeare and the dramatists of his time made a series of dramatic laws and principles for themselves and observed them fairly well.

¹ A proof of Shakespeare's random habits and associates in his youthful days may be found in a traditionary anecdote, picked up at Stratford by the elder Ireland, and mentioned in his *Picturesque Views on the Avon*.

About seven miles from Stratford lies the thirsty little market town of Bedford, famous for its ale. Two societies of the village yeomanry used to meet, under the appellation of the "Bedford toppers," and to challenge the lovers of good ale of the neighboring villages to a contest of drinking. Among others, the people of Stratford were called out to prove the strength of their heads, and in the number of the champions was Shakespeare, who, in spite of the proverb that "they who drink beer

will think beer," was as true to his ale as Falstaff to his sack. The chivalry of Stratford was staggered at the first onset, and sounded a retreat while they had yet legs to carry them off the field. They had scarcely marched a mile when, their legs failing them, they were forced to lie down under a crab tree, where they passed the night. It is still standing, and goes by the name of Shakespeare's tree.

In the morning his companions awaked the bard, and proposed returning to Bedford, but he declined, saying he had had enough, having drank with

Piping Pebworth, Dancing Marston,
Haunted Hilbro', Hungry Grafton,
Dudging Exhall, Papist Wicksford,
Beggary Broom, and Drunken Bedford.

"The villages here alluded to," says Ireland, "still bear the epithets thus given them; the people of Pebworth are still famed for their skill on the pipe and tabor; Hilborough is now called 'Haunted Hilborough,' and Grafton is famous for the poverty of its soil."

—IRVING'S NOTE.

from which Shakespeare must have derived his earliest ideas of rural imagery.

The country was yet naked and leafless, but English scenery is always verdant, and the sudden change in the temperature of the weather was surprising in its quickening effects upon the landscape. It was inspiring and animating to witness this first awakening of spring, to feel its warm breath stealing over the senses, to see the moist mellow earth beginning to put forth the green sprout and the tender blade, and the trees and shrubs in their reviving tints and bursting buds giving the promise of returning foliage and flower. The cold snow-drop, that little borderer on the skirts of winter, was to be seen with its chaste white blossoms in the small gardens before the cottages. The bleating of the new-dropt lambs was faintly heard from the fields. The sparrow twittered about the thatched eaves and budding hedges; the robin threw a livelier note into his late querulous wintry strain; and the lark, springing up from the reeking bosom of the meadow, towered away into the bright fleecy cloud, pouring forth torrents of melody. As I watched the little songster, mounting up higher and higher until his body was a mere speck on the white bosom of the cloud, while the ear was still filled with his music, it called to mind Shakespeare's exquisite little song in *Cymbeline*:

Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
 And Phœbus 'gins arise,
 His steeds to water at those springs,
 On chaliced flowers that lies.

And winking mary-buds begin
 To ope their golden eyes;
 With everything that pretty bin,¹
 My lady sweet arise!

Indeed the whole country about here is poetic ground; everything is associated with the idea of Shakespeare. Every

¹ an obsolete form from *be*.

old cottage that I saw, I fancied into some resort of his boyhood, where he had acquired his intimate knowledge of rustic life and manners, and heard those legendary tales and wild superstitions which he has woven like witchcraft into his dramas. For in his time, we are told, it was a popular amusement in winter evenings "to sit round the fire and tell merry tales of errant knights, queens, lovers, lords, ladies, giants, dwarfs, thieves, cheaters, witches, fairies, goblins, and friars."¹

My route for a part of the way lay in sight of the Avon, which made a variety of the most fancy doublings and windings through a wide and fertile valley; sometimes glittering from among willows which fringed its borders, sometimes disappearing among groves or beneath green banks, and sometimes rambling out into full view, and making an azure sweep round a slope of meadow land. This beautiful bosom of country is called the Vale of the Red Horse. A distant line of undulating blue hills seems to be its boundary, whilst all the soft intervening landscape lies in a manner enchained in the silver links of the Avon.

After pursuing the road for about three miles, I turned off into a footpath which led along the borders of fields and under hedgerows to a private gate of the park; there was a stile, however, for the benefit of the pedestrian, there being a public right of way through the grounds. I delight in these hospitable estates, in which every one has a kind of property—at least as far as the footpath is concerned. It in some measure reconciles a poor man to his lot, and what is more to the better lot of his neighbor, thus to have parks and pleas-

¹ Scot, in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, enumerates a host of these fireside fancies. "And they have so fraid us with bull-beggars, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, syrens, kit with the can sticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, gigantes, imps, calcars, conjurors,

nymphes, changelings, incubus, Robin-good-fellow, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell-waine, the fier-drake, the puckle, Tom Thombe, hob-goblins, Tom Tumbler, boneless, and such other bugs, that we were afraid of our own shadowes."—IRVING'S NOTE.

ure grounds thrown open for his recreation. He breathes the pure air as freely and lolls as luxuriously under the shade as the lord of the soil; and if he has not the privilege of calling all that he sees his own, he has not at the same time the trouble of paying for it and keeping it in order.

I now found myself among the noble avenues of oaks and elms whose vast size bespoke the growth of centuries. The wind sounded solemnly among their branches, and the rooks cawed from their hereditary nests in the treetops. The eye ranged through a long lessening vista, with nothing to interrupt the view but a distant statue and a vagrant deer stalking like a shadow across the opening.

There is something about these stately old avenues that has the effect of Gothic architecture,¹ not merely from the pretended similarity or form, but from their bearing the evidence of long duration, and of having had their origin in a period of time with which we associate ideas of romantic grandeur. They betoken also the long settled dignity and proudly concentrated independence of an ancient family; and I have heard a worthy but aristocratic old family observe, when speaking of the sumptuous palaces of modern gentry, that money could do much with stone and mortar, but, thank Heaven, there was no such thing as suddenly building up an avenue of oaks.

It was from wandering in early life among this rich scenery and about the romantic solitudes of the adjoining park of Fullbroke, which then formed a part of the Lucy estate, that some of Shakespeare's commentators have supposed he derived his noble forest meditations of Jaques and the enchanting woodland pictures in *As You Like It*.² It is in lonely

¹ Irving is thinking of a great Gothic church, like Westminster Abbey, of which the characteristic is the lofty columns from which spring the vaults supporting the roof.

² Although the scene is supposed to lie

in the Forest of Arden, yet in this play, as in others, Shakespeare makes no effort to reproduce the actual characteristics of his original, but describes it as though it were the England of his own day.

wanderings through such scenes that the mind drinks deep but quiet draughts of inspiration and becomes intensely sensible of the beauty and majesty of nature. The imagination kindles into reverie and rapture, vague but exquisite images and ideas keep breaking upon it; and we revel in a mute and almost incommunicable luxury of thought. It was in some such mood, and perhaps under one of those very trees before me which threw their broad shades over the grassy banks and quivering waters of the Avon, that the poet's fancy may have sallied forth into that little song which breathes the very soul of a rural voluptuary:

Under the greenwood tree,
 Who loves to lie with me,
 And tune his merry throat
 Unto the sweet bird's note,
 Come hither, come hither, come hither?
 Here shall he see
 No enemy,
 But winter and rough weather.¹

I had now come in sight of the house. It is a large building of brick, with stone quoins, and is in the Gothic style of Queen Elizabeth's day, having been built in the first year of her reign. The exterior remains very nearly in its original state, and may be considered a fair specimen of the residence of a wealthy country gentleman of those days. A great gateway opens from the park into a kind of courtyard in front of the house, ornamented with a grass-plot, shrubs, and flowerbeds. The gateway is in imitation of the ancient barbican, being a kind of outpost, and flanked by towers, though evidently for mere ornament instead of defence. The front of the house is completely in the old style, with stone-shafted casements, a great bow-window of heavy stone-work, and a portal with armorial bearings over it carved in stone. At

¹ *As You Like It*, II, v, 1.

each corner of the building is an octagon tower surmounted by a gilt ball and weathercock.

The Avon, which winds through the park, makes a bend just at the foot of a gently sloping bank which sweeps down from the rear of the house. Large herds of deer were feeding or reposing upon its borders, and swans were sailing majestically upon its bosom. As I contemplated the venerable old mansion, I called to mind Falstaff's encomium on Justice Shallow's abode, and the affected indifference and real vanity of the latter:

Falstaff.—You have a goodly dwelling and a rich.

Shallow.—Barren, barren, barren; beggars all, beggars all, Sir John:—marry, good air.¹

Whatever may have been the joviality of the old mansion in the days of Shakespeare, it had now an air of stillness and solitude. The great iron gateway that opened into the courtyard was locked; there was no show of servants bustling about the place; the deer gazed quietly at me as I passed, being no longer harried by the moss-troopers of Stratford. The only sign of domestic life that I met with was a white cat stealing with wary look and stealthy pace toward the stables, as if on some nefarious expedition. I must not omit to mention the carcase of a scoundrel crow which I saw suspended against the barn wall, as it shows that the Lucys still inherit that lordly abhorrence of poachers and maintain that rigorous exercise of territorial power which was so strenuously manifested in the case of the bard.

After prowling about for some time, I at length found my way to a lateral portal which was the everyday entrance to the mansion. I was courteously received by a worthy old housekeeper, who, with the civility and communicativeness of her order, showed me the interior of the house. The greater

¹ *Henry IV*, V, iii, 8.

part has undergone alterations and been adapted to modern tastes and modes of living. There is a fine old oaken staircase, and the great hall, that noble feature in an ancient manor-house, still retains much of the appearance it must have had in the days of Shakespeare. The ceiling is arched and lofty, and at one end is a gallery in which stands an organ. The weapons and trophies of the chase, which formerly adorned the hall of a country gentleman, have made way for family portraits. There is a wide, hospitable fireplace, calculated for an ample, old-fashioned wood fire, formerly the rallying-place of winter festivity. On the opposite side of the hall is the huge Gothic bow-window with stone shafts, which looks out upon the courtyard. Here are emblazoned in stained glass the armorial bearings of the Lucy family for many generations, some being dated in 1558. I was delighted to observe in the quarterings the three *white luces* by which the character of Sir Thomas was first identified with that of Justice Shallow. They are mentioned in the first scene of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where the Justice is in a rage with Falstaff for having "beaten his men, killed his deer, and broken into his lodge." The poet had, no doubt, the offences of himself and his comrades in mind at the time, and we may suppose the family pride and vindictive threats of the puissant Shallow to be a caricature of the pompous indignation of Sir Thomas.

Shallow.—Sir Hugh, persuade me not: I will make a Star Chamber matter of it; if he were twenty John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Sir Robert Shallow, Esq.

Slender.—In the county of Gloster, justice of peace, and *coram*.

Shallow.—Ay, cousin Slender, and *custalorum*.

Slender.—Ay, and *ratalorum*, too, and a gentleman born, master parson; who writes himself *Armigero* in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, *Armigero*.

Shallow.—Ay, that I do; and have done any time these three hundred years.

Slender.—All his successors gone before him have done 't, and all

his ancestors that come after him may; they may give the dozen *white luces* in their coat. . . .

Shallow.—The council shall hear it; it is a riot.

Evans.—It is not meet the council hear of a riot; there is no fear of Got in a riot; the council, hear you, shall desire to hear the fear of Got, and not to hear a riot; take your vizaments in that.

Shallow.—Ha! o' my life, if I were young again, the sword should end it!¹

Near the window thus emblazoned hung a portrait by Sir Peter Lely² of one of the Lucy family, a great beauty of the time of Charles the Second. The old housekeeper shook her head as she pointed to the picture, and informed me that this lady had been sadly addicted to cards, and had gambled away a great portion of the family estate, among which was that part of the park where Shakespeare and his comrades had killed the deer. The lands thus lost had not been entirely regained by the family even at the present day. It is but justice to this recreant dame to confess that she had a surpassingly fine hand and arm.

The picture which most attracted my attention was a great painting over the fireplace, containing likenesses of Sir Thomas Lucy and his family, who inhabited the hall in the latter part of Shakespeare's lifetime. I at first thought that it was the vindictive knight himself, but the housekeeper assured me that it was his son, the only likeness extant of the former being an effigy upon his tomb in the church of the neighboring hamlet of Charlecote.³ The picture gives a lively

¹ From the beginning of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

² The Court painter of Charles the Second who painted the great beauties of the day.

³ This effigy is in white marble, and represents the knight in complete armor. Near him lies the effigy of his wife, and on her tomb is the following inscription, which, if really composed by her husband, places him quite above the intellectual level of Master Shallow :

“Here lyeth the Lady Joyce Lucy wife of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecot in ye county of Warwick, Knight, Daughter and heir of Thomas Acton of Sutton in ye county of Worcester Esquire who departed out of this wretched world to her heavenly kingdom ye 10 day of February in ye yeare of our Lord God 1595 and of her age 60 and three. All the time of her lyfe a true and faythful servant of her good God, never detected of any cryme or vice. In religion most sounde, in love to her hus-

idea of the costume and manners of the time. Sir Thomas is dressed in ruff and doublet, white shoes with roses in them, and has a peaked yellow, or as Master Slender would say, "a cane-colored beard." His lady is seated on the opposite side of the picture, in wide ruff and long stomacher, and the children have a most venerable stiffness and formality of dress. Hounds and spaniels are mingled in the family group; a hawk is seated on his perch in the foreground, and one of the children holds a bow—all intimating the knight's skill in hunting, hawking, and archery, so indispensable to an accomplished gentleman in those days.¹

I regretted to find that the ancient furniture of the hall had disappeared; for I had hoped to meet with the stately elbow-chair of carved oak in which the country squire of former days was wont to sway the sceptre of empire over his rural domains, and in which it might be presumed the redoubted Sir Thomas sat enthroned in awful state when the recreant Shakespeare was brought before him. As I like to deck out pictures for my own entertainment, I pleased myself with the idea that this very hall had been the scene of the unlucky bard's examination on the morning after his captivity in the lodge. I fancied to myself the rural potentate

band most faythful and true. In friendship most constant; to what in trust was committed unto her most secret. In wisdom excelling. In governing of her house, bringing up of youth in ye fear of God that did converse with her moste rare and singular. A great maintayner of hospitality. Greatly esteemed of her betters; misliked of none unless of the envious. When all is spoken that can be saide a woman so garnished with virtue as not to be bettered and hardly to be equalled by any. Asshee lived most virtuously so shee died most Godly. Set downe by him yt best did knowe what hath byn written to be true.

Thomas Lucye."

—IRVING'S NOTE.

gentleman of his time, observes: "His housekeeping is seen much in the different families of dogs and serving-men attendant on their kennels; and the deepness of their throats is the depth of his discourse. A hawk he esteems the true burden of nobility, and is exceedingly ambitious to seem delighted with the sport, and have his fist gloved with his jesses." And Gilpin, in his description of a Mr. Hastings, remarks: "He kept all sorts of hounds that run buck, fox, hare, otter, and badger; and had hawks of all kinds, both long and short winged. His great hall was commonly strewed with marrow-bones, and full of hawk perches, hounds, spaniels, and terriers. On a broad hearth, paved with brick, lay some of the choicest terriers, hounds, and spaniels."—IRVING.

¹ Bishop Earle, speaking of the country

surrounded by his body-guard of butler, pages, and blue-coated serving-men, with their badges; while the luckless culprit was brought in, forlorn and chopfallen, in the custody of gamekeepers, huntsmen, and whippers-in, and followed by a rabble rout of country clowns. I fancied bright faces of curious housemaids peeping from the half-opened doors, while from the gallery the fair daughters of the knight leaned gracefully forward, eyeing the youthful prisoner with that pity "that dwells in womanhood." Who would have thought that this poor varlet, thus trembling before the brief authority of a country squire, and the sport of rustic boors, was soon to become the delight of princes, the theme of all tongues and ages, the dictator to the human mind, and was to confer immortality on his oppressor by a caricature and a lampoon!

I was now invited by the butler to walk into the garden, and I felt inclined to visit the orchard and arbor where the justice treated Sir John Falstaff and Cousin Silence "to a last year's pippin" of his own grafting, with a "dish of caraways";¹ but I had already spent so much of the day in my ramblings that I was obliged to give up any further investigations. When about to take my leave, I was gratified by the civil entreaties of the housekeeper and butler that I would take some refreshment—an instance of good old hospitality which, I grieve to say, we castle-hunters seldom meet with in modern days. I make no doubt it is a virtue which the present representative of the Lucys inherits from his ancestors; for Shakespeare, even in his caricature, makes Justice Shallow importunate in this respect, as witness his pressing instances to Falstaff.

"By cock and pye, sir, you shall not away to-night. . . . I will not excuse you; you shall not be excused; excuses shall not be admitted; there is no excuse shall serve; you shall not be excused. . . . Some pigeons, Davy; a couple of short-legged hens; a joint of mutton; and any pretty little tiny kickshaws, tell William Cook."

¹ The allusions are to the last act of *Henry IV.*

I now bade a reluctant farewell to the old hall. My mind had become so completely possessed by the imaginary scenes and characters connected with it that I seemed to be actually living among them. Everything brought them as it were before my eyes; and as the door of the dining-room opened, I almost expected to hear the feeble voice of Master Silence quavering forth his favorite ditty:

'T is merry in hall, when beards wag all,
And welcome merry Shrove-tide!

On returning to my inn, I could not but reflect on the singular gift of the poet; to be able thus to spread the magic of his mind over the very face of nature, to give to things and places a charm and character not their own, and to turn this "working-day world"¹ into a perfect fairy-land. He is indeed the true enchanter, whose spell operates, not upon the senses, but upon the imagination and the heart. Under the wizard influence of Shakespeare I had been walking all day in a complete delusion. I had surveyed the landscape through the prism of poetry which tinged every object with the hues of the rainbow. I had been surrounded with fancied beings, with mere airy nothings conjured up by poetic power, yet which to me had all the charm of reality. I had heard Jaques soliloquize beneath his oak, had beheld the fair Rosalind and her companion adventuring through the woodlands, and above all had been once more present in spirit with fat Jack Falstaff and his contemporaries, from the august Justice Shallow down to the gentle Master Slender and the sweet Anne Page. Ten thousand honors and blessings on the bard who has thus gilded the dull realities of life with innocent illusions, who has spread exquisite and unbought pleasures in my checkered path, and beguiled my spirit in many a lonely hour with all the cordial and cheerful sympathies of social life!

¹ *As You Like It*, I, iii, 12.

As I crossed the bridge over the Avon on my return, I paused to contemplate the distant church in which the poet lies buried, and could not but exult in the malediction which has kept his ashes undisturbed in its quiet and hallowed vaults. What honor could his name have derived from being mingled in dusty companionship with the epitaphs and escutcheons and venal eulogiums of a titled multitude? What would a crowded corner in Westminster Abbey¹ have been, compared with this reverend pile which seems to stand in beautiful loneliness as his sole mausoleum! The solicitude about the grave may be but the offspring of an overwrought sensibility; but human nature is made up of foibles and prejudices, and its best and tenderest affections are mingled with these factitious feelings. He who has sought renown about the world, and has reaped a full harvest of worldly favor, will find after all that there is no love, no admiration, no applause so sweet to the soul as that which springs up in his native place. It is there that he seeks to be gathered in peace and honor among his kindred and his early friends. And when the weary heart and failing head begin to warn him that the evening of life is drawing on, he turns as fondly as does the infant to the mother's arms, to sink to sleep in the bosom of the scene of his childhood.

How would it have cheered the spirit of the youthful bard when, wandering forth in disgrace upon a doubtful world, he cast back a heavy look upon his paternal home, could he have foreseen that before many years he should return to it covered with renown; that his name should become the boast and glory of his native place; that his ashes should be religiously guarded as its most precious treasure; and that its lessening spire, on which his eyes were fixed in tearful contemplation, should one day become the beacon, towering amidst the gentle landscape, to guide the literary pilgrim of every nation to his tomb!

¹ See p. 12.

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